

SCHOOL REPORTS
UNIVERSITY FICTION IN THE MASCULINE TRADITION OF NEW ZEALAND
LITERATURE

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Abstract

This thesis will investigate the fictional discourse that has developed around academia and how this discourse has manifested itself in the New Zealand literary tradition, primarily in the works of M.K. Joseph, Dan Davin and James K. Baxter. These three writers have been selected because of their status within Kai Jensen's conception of "a literary tradition of excitement about masculinity";¹ in other words, the masculine tradition in New Zealand literature which provides fictional representations of factual events and tensions. This literary approach is also utilised in the tradition of British university fiction, in which the behaviour of students and faculty are often deliberately exaggerated in order to provide a representation of campus life that captures the essence of the reality without being wholly factual. The fact that these three writers attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to combine the two traditions is a matter of great literary interest: Joseph's *A Pound of Saffron* (1962) appropriates tropes of the British university novel while extending them to include concerns specific to New Zealand; Davin's *Cliffs of Fall* (1945), *Not Here, Not Now* (1970) and *Brides of Price* (1972) attempt to blend traditions of university fiction with the masculine realist tradition in New Zealand literature, though, as we will see, with limited success; Baxter's station as the maternal grandson of a noted professor allows him to criticise the elitist New Zealand university system in *Horse* (1985) from a unique position, for he was more sympathetic towards what he considered the working class "peasant wisdom" of his father, Archie, than the "professorial knowledge" of Archie's father-in-law.² These three authors have been chosen also because of the way they explore attitudes towards universities amongst mainstream New Zealand society in their writing, for while most novels in the British tradition demonstrate little tension between those within the university walls and those without, in New Zealand fiction the tension is palpable. The motivations for this tension will also be explored in due course, but before we can grapple with how the tradition of British university fiction has impacted New Zealand literature, we must first examine the tradition itself.

¹ Kai Jensen, *Whole Men – The Masculine Tradition in New Zealand Literature*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1996, p. 8

² Paul Millar (ed.), *Spark To A Waiting Fuse – James K. Baxter's Correspondence with Noel Ginn 1942-1946*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2001, p. 19

“It's true. Novelists are terrible liars. They make things up. They change things around. Black becomes white, white black. They are totally unethical beings.”

-Morris Zapp³

³ David Lodge, *Small World*, Penguin Books, London, 1985, p. 135

Introduction

In *Small World* (1984), a typically sardonic novel about the world of academic conferences by David Lodge, Professor Morris Zapp becomes frustrated in his attempts to explain to Fulvia, who is seducing him, that aspects of his ex-wife Désirée's novel concerning himself are erroneous. The frustration stems from Zapp's inability to impart to Fulvia that, while her description of his chest hair is accurate, Désirée's claim that his penis is twenty-five centimetres long and that he forced her into bondage games are mere exaggeration. It is during these flustered efforts that he utters the quotation in the epigraph to this thesis, although beforehand he admits that “[s]ome of the minor details are taken from life”.⁴ From within a university novel by arguably the best contemporary author in the genre, Zapp brings attention to one of the problems with the form: those who read university novels are likely to assume that they reflect the reality of campus life, no matter how outlandish the behaviour of students and faculty alike becomes, and, while there are kernels of truth in the majority of university fiction, for the most part specific details are exaggerated for effect in the same way as are Zapp's penis size and sexual appetites. Elaine Showalter admits to initially treating the canon of university novels as handbooks of sorts, for they taught her “how a proper professor should speak, behave, dress, think, write, love, succeed, or fail”, just as Fulvia believes the worst about Zapp.⁵ However, as Showalter settled into her station as a professor, she noticed a gap between what she lived and what she read, prompting her to write *Faculty Towers*, a review of university fiction after the 1950s, in an attempt to measure how much truth can be found in the genre, to what degree the exaggerations take hold and, most importantly, their

⁴ *Small World*, p. 135

⁵ Elaine Showalter, *Faculty Towers: The Academic Novel and its Discontents*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2005, p. 2

implications for the image of academia. This study will follow suit by analysing the effects of the culture of Oxbridge on university literature in New Zealand, while also examining the reciprocal relationship between this literature and the perception of academia to those within and outside its walls.

Along with adolescent fiction and fantasy, university fiction is one of the great critically underrated literary genres. Despite university fiction often being well-received, widely read and financially successful, critical work on the genre is inexplicably scarce. What criticism there is of the genre largely (if not exclusively) belongs to the discourse following Mortimer R. Proctor's seminal *The English University Novel* (1957), the first attempt at imposing “scholarly order on a disorderly fictional tradition”.⁶ Other notable studies include Ian Carter's *Ancient Cultures of Conceit* (1990), Janice Rossen's *The University in Modern Fiction* (1993), David Bevan's collection of essays, *University Fiction* (1990), and of course Showalter's study, yet while they often cross-reference and overlap each other in terms of the novels discussed and certain themes, there is a distinct lack of a unified definition of university fiction. In fact, as one goes deeper into the genre, a proper definition seems more unattainable because the canon of university fiction varies so wildly. Despite Showalter's claim that “the novels operate on a set of conventions, themes, tropes, and values”,⁷ none of these are hard and fast, with each established trope of university fiction being implemented only when it suits the author's needs. This can be seen in *Faculty Towers*, in which Showalter discusses university novels about such diverse topics as sexual harassment,⁸ Jewish literary

⁶ Richard Sheppard, “From Narragonia to Elysium: Some Preliminary Reflections on the Fictional Image of the Academic”, pp. 11-48 in David Bevan (ed.), *University Fiction*, Rodopi, The Netherlands, 1990, p. 11

⁷ *Faculty Towers*, p. 3

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-117

identity and,⁹ in the case of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), “great American fiction about the soul.”¹⁰ Clearly there is more variety within the genre than might initially be presumed, which reflects the ever-changing culture surrounding universities, yet there is an identifiable tradition in university fiction, at the very least in its British incarnation, which has specific literary roots comprehensively mapped out by studies such as that of Proctor.

Origins

University novels vary as wildly as universities themselves but, as Proctor demonstrates, the form of university fiction began with a more straightforward framework and changes to academic culture have contributed to changes in the genre. This is often a reciprocal relationship, for university fiction shapes the culture of academia as it reports on it, as evidenced in Proctor's argument for Geoffrey Chaucer as the original university author. *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400) is posited as featuring the debut of scholars in literature in *The Reeve's Tale* and *The Miller's Tale*, where, unlike most modern fictional accounts of scholars, there is no criticism or mockery inherent in the portrayals. This is because Chaucer wrote “while both Oxford and Cambridge held unquestioned leadership in the intellectual life of England”,¹¹ so his scholars are shown as being preternaturally cunning in order to reflect the status enjoyed by academics of the time. Proctor also describes an “almost frontierlike atmosphere of violence in the universities,”¹² however, and Chaucer's omission of this troublesome element suggests that the prestige of Oxford and Cambridge (or “Oxbridge”) was derived more from fictional representations of campus life than factual reports on the

⁹ *Faculty Towers*, p. 66

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77

¹¹ Mortimer R. Proctor, *The English University Novel*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1957, pp. 13-14

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 14

universities themselves. Evidence of this can be found by examining the writing that came after *The Canterbury Tales* and its effect on the culture of Oxbridge.

As Chaucer's portrayals match his own idealisation of the university, fictional portrayals of scholars after the “confiscations, burnings, and hasty alterations in prescribed teaching” of the Reformation established the model of the “scholar-fool” in university fiction.¹³ The scholar-fool, described as “one given over to worthless knowledge, and so naïve and ignorant of the ways of the world that he could be put upon by the slenderest ruses”¹⁴ appeared because of falling standards at Oxford. The intellectual ideals of Oxford were collapsing during the sixteenth century as preference was given to the aristocracy, who saw an Oxford education as their birthright, over the scholarly poor, who had to work harder to gain recognition, if any was gained at all. The prestige of Oxbridge was valued over intellectualism, leaving the institution wide open for parody, both of the vicious (as seen in *The Merie Tales of Skelton* {1567}) and jocular variety (as seen in *The Jests of Scogin* {1565}).¹⁵ The scholar in *The Merie Tales of Skelton* verbally abuses his bishop and warns his parishioners that he will make cuckolds of each of them if they object to his mistress, while the scholar in the later volume sells sawdust as flea powder, urging his customers to “hold open the mouth of each flea and pour in sawdust until it choked”.¹⁶ The former scholar is shown to be aggressively callous and somewhat misguided by his own arrogance, with the latter merely proven ridiculous, yet while both portrayals are markedly different in tone they share the intention of discrediting the idea of scholarship and reinforcing the negative stereotypes of academics as cruel or clueless. Their spirit lives on in most university fiction which followed.

¹³ *The English University Novel*, p. 16

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17-18

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17-18

University Fiction in the 1700s

By the eighteenth century, English campus life was more “preoccupied with dress, gaming, drinking and wenching, in a frenzied and moderately successful effort to practice the arts of the beau monde” because of the lack of energy given to robust scholarship.¹⁷ This gave rise to the image of the deviant student, who drinks and courts in lieu of study, devoting all of his skill to social pursuits over intellectualism. Like the scholar-fool, this stereotype still holds strong in the minds of many, and it is the contribution of publications such as *The Connoisseur* that have allowed it to maintain its strength within the discourse. The August 21 edition of *The Connoisseur* in 1755 advised a young man entering university to avoid becoming a pedant but to avoid also “the atheists, drunkards, rakes and liars whom he was bound to encounter there”, which Proctor claims reflects “the general assumption that an introduction to sin would necessarily accompany a university career”.¹⁸ This approach is a reversal of Chaucer's, since, while he neglected to mention the negative aspects of scholarship, *The Connoisseur* devotes no space to the so-called “reading men” who contributed substantial and influential scholarship,¹⁹ and in doing so lends a negative quality to the image of campus life.

Portrayals such as these became more common in university literature of the eighteenth century, although another less common trope to appear is the scholar unable to adapt well to society outside academia, which derives slightly from the scholar-fool model and was

¹⁷ *The English University Novel*, p. 36

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36

popular in periodicals such as *The Babler* and *The Tatler*.²⁰ Yet while the image of the ungentlemanly scholar also prevails today, the deviant student was the trope of greater currency during this era, as seen in novels such as *Tom Jones* (1749), *The History of Pompey the Little* (1751) and *The Adventures of Oxytel Classic, Esq.: Once an Oxford Scholar* (1768), to name a few of Proctor's chosen examples. Proctor refers to the last novel as “an anonymous slander which is probably the earliest approach to a university novel” and cannot fathom whether its author was bitter over his experience at Oxford or “simply had a taste for the obscene”, suggesting that his novel could be either an attack on Oxbridge or mere indulgence.²¹ Whatever the author's intentions, the novel reflects the reputation held by Oxbridge at the time while simultaneously reinforcing it to such an extent that at least two other novels borrowed the idea to further besmirch Oxbridge's name and help it attain an “aura of wickedness”.²²

The Culture of Oxbridge into the 1900s

It may seem inexplicable that Oxbridge (or at least, Oxford) is such a focal point for Proctor, but the cult of Oxbridge is key to any study of university literature because Cambridge and Oxford, for most intents and purposes, are the definitive campuses in these novels. The most basic justification for this statement is the overwhelming popularity of Oxford as a setting for university novels, with Proctor claiming that “approximately 85 per cent” of the novels he discusses use Oxford,²³ and Carter makes similar claims, stating that 119 of the 204 novels in

²⁰ *The English University Novel*, p. 38

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46

²² *Ibid.*, p. 50

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 4

his study are also set there.²⁴ There are more robust reasons for this sentiment, however, such as Oxford's station as the oldest university in the English-speaking world and, most importantly, its function as a symbol of British culture. In the wake of the unflattering literary discourse during the eighteenth century, those writing a venerating Oxbridge novel began to emphasise the social aspect of the university as more beneficial than any formal education offered and, by the twentieth century, the cult of Oxbridge became practically synonymous with British culture. Michael, the protagonist of Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street* (1913-14) demonstrates this sentiment:

“I'm so positive that the best of Oxford is the best of England, and that the best of England is the best of humanity that I long to apply to the world the same standards we tacitly respect – we under-graduates. I believe every problem of life can be solved by the transcendency of the spirit which has transcended us up here.”²⁵

Having Michael extol the virtues of the university in such a way adds to the discourse the idea of Oxford as a training ground for upstanding British citizens. Notions of prestige are also maintained; Michael feels that he is among the best for going to Oxford, yet neglects to mention any academic achievement, implying that his views on the university are similar to those held in the sixteenth century. There is also the superiority and elitism that are often parodied in twentieth century university novels, with Michael appearing to posit himself as among “the best of humanity” by virtue of being an Oxford alumnus. This idealisation of the university influenced other novels of the era, most explicitly Beverly Nichols' *Patchwork* (1921), the protagonist of which has read *Sinister Street* and has “made up his mind he was

²⁴ Ian Carter, *Ancient Cultures of Conceit: British university fiction in the post-war years*, Routledge, London, 1990, p. 5

²⁵ Compton Mackenzie, *Sinister Street*, D. Appleton and Co., New York, 1914, p. 222, quoted in *The English University Novel*, p. 157

going to live that sort of life again”.²⁶ This demonstrates the power of Mackenzie's rhetoric, as Ray wants to recapture an essence of Oxford that existed in a work of fiction, and this sort of rhetoric also affects people in reality.

As Showalter's initial faith in the validity of university fiction shows, assuming that fictional portrayals of campus life match the reality is common behaviour in those who have yet to become assimilated into academia; but Nichols' reference to Mackenzie's novel also demonstrates the intertextuality of university novels of the twentieth century (as does Lodge's reference to Showalter herself in *Nice Work* {1988}),²⁷ which continually inform each other as much as the discourse itself informs those outside the campus walls. The focus on the alternative education to be found at Oxbridge appears to have been the popular choice in early twentieth century university novels, with E.M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907) and Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) amongst the more notable examples. The inclusion of both novels in the canon may seem tenuous because very little time in either of them is devoted to campus life, yet both portray the Oxbridge education of their characters as defining aspects of their lives. While Proctor feels that Waugh uses Oxford as nothing more than a setting for a “somewhat tortured study of neurosis induced by family church”,²⁸ later studies have been able to put *Brideshead Revisited* in its proper historical context.

In “From Narragonia to Elysium”, the first essay in *University Fiction*, Richard Sheppard follows Proctor's model by citing numerous texts and using them to build on his predecessor's

²⁶ Beverly Nichols, *Patchwork* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1921). pp299-300, quoted in *The English University Novel*, p. 163

²⁷ David Lodge, *Nice Work*, pp 579-897 in *A David Lodge Trilogy: Changing Places, Small World and Nice Work*, Penguin Books, London, 1993, p. 848

²⁸ *The English University Novel*, p. 175

analyses, such as his work on the cult of Oxbridge. Sheppard also discusses *Sinister Street* at some length, as well as adding titles such as Ivor Brown's *Years of Plenty* (1915) and Dacre Balsdon's *Freshman's Folly* (1952) to Proctor's list of works inspired by Mackenzie's novel, concluding that this celebration of Oxbridge “shaped the greater part of British university fiction, especially those novels which are generally regarded as major representatives of the sub-genre”, such as those of Forster and Waugh.²⁹ The dons and undergraduates who populated the fictional Oxford of these books were either treated with respect or gentle good humour because the ideals of the university inherited from the nineteenth century were “perceived to be at one with, even central to British public life,”³⁰ and, as Sheppard mentions, there is only a need for caustic university fiction if the university is seen as problematic.³¹ Also, the increased industrialisation of Britain that began in the nineteenth century and created the need for universities with a “bias towards vocational, professional and technological education,”³² helped universities seem more useful to the general public and less worthy of scorn, ensuring a more tepid and non-confrontational discourse of campus fiction.

The Ideals of a University

In the wake of this devotion to vocational education in universities, there came defences of liberal education, the two most notable of which are John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University* (1852) and Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). Both argue that liberal education must prove its legitimacy by aiding students in their pursuit of becoming highly ethical and cultured individuals, with Newman claiming that to receive a liberal university

²⁹ “From Narragonia to Elysium”, pp. 34-35

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21

³² *Ibid.*, p. 36

education makes one a gentleman who has “a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind” and “a noble and courteous bearing on the conduct of life”.³³ Arnold pushes this idea further by equating university with culture and defining a liberal education as “an elevation of our best self, and a harmonising in sub-ordination to this, and to the idea of a perfected humanity, in all the multitudinous, turbulent, and blind impulses of our ordinary selves,”³⁴ which sounds rather promising until one realises that Arnold uses this to justify imperialist expansion. While it is admirable to aspire to greatness of the type described by Newman, statements such as Arnold's claim that “no people in the world have done more and struggled more to attain this relative moral perfection than our English race has”³⁵ carry with them a nationalistic taint which suggests that a liberal education helps a young man aid the cause of the Empire. As Sheppard puts it:

In other words, the new spirit...which informed the reorganisation, expansion, opening-out and liberalisation of British universities from about the middle of the nineteenth century involved two, related aims. On the one hand, the production of a growing number of technologically trained graduates whose task would be to modernise the face of Britain and exploit the wealth of a rapidly expanding Empire, and on the other, the production of a growing number of high quality graduates, nurtured on high liberal ideals, whose task would be to administer governmental policy at home and abroad.³⁶

A far cry from *Sinister Street's* alternative education, this imperialistic conception of a liberal education becomes intertwined with conceptions of Oxbridge thanks to the rhetoric of Arnold and his ilk, with Sheppard interpreting him as declaring Oxford “the home of Britain's

³³ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1895, p. 14

³⁴ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1966, p. 182

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 155

³⁶ “From Narragonia to Elysium”, p. 38

intellectual conscience, whence the regeneration of the nation (and even the world) was to flow.”³⁷ The implications of this mode of thought can be seen in Chris Baldick's report on a symposium on “The Duties of the Universities towards our Indian Empire” in 1884, when it was decided that “the culture that men got at Oxford or Cambridge was of the greatest importance in dealing with the natives”.³⁸ Along with religion and political constructs, universities became another tool of colonialism with the assumption that the “natives” could easily become assimilated into British society by adhering to the tenets of Oxbridge culture, with such notions of the cultural capital of Oxbridge no doubt spurring on novels like Forster and Waugh's. While this idealisation of Oxbridge is no longer at the forefront of university fiction, except in a farcical sense, the impact of the cult of Oxbridge has extended to colonised countries and persists throughout the history of the discourse.

Oxbridge and the Working Class

“Oxford and Cambridge”, says Carter, “are finishing schools for men born to rule”,³⁹ a statement in tune with previous arguments. However, in the post-war period Carter examines, a tension between working-class and middle-class students given to rigorous study and aristocratic students coasting on the prestige of Oxbridge appears in university fiction. Once again Arnold comes into play here, arguing that culture needs to be protected from the proletariat if the cultural standard is to remain unchanged in an effort to “define circumstances in which an intellectual elite could float free from social determination”.⁴⁰ This need to protect Oxbridge values became acute as state grants became common after the

³⁷ “From Narragonia to Elysium”, p. 39

³⁸ Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism 1848-1932*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983, p. 70

³⁹ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 83

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106, p. 108

Second World War, allowing more people from outside aristocracy to attend university, although the class barrier maintained its hold. The protagonist of Raymond Postgate's *The Ledger is Kept* (1953), on thinking of himself as one of the “privileged few” to be receiving an Oxford education, cannot forget “the outsiders who will never have it”, adding that he becomes “again one of the people who never have a golden Oxford afternoon” when he visits home, but forgets “the way they live” upon his return to university,⁴¹ showing how guilt can manifest itself when one pursues Oxbridge ideals instead of those more in tune with working class roots. Another Oxford student feels that his lower class bars him from few privileges, and because he had “gone to an obscure public school” with a “so-so” reputation and had “acquired a passable variant of the BBC voice” he is able play the role of Oxford student convincingly, showing that the idealisation of Oxbridge can work to one's benefit through exploitation and is therefore less powerful than was previously thought. However, among the best expressions of this tension in university fiction, if not the best, is Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1954), a university farce that not only effectively grapples with class issues but also helped the campus spoof once again gain popularity.

If *Lucky Jim* is not the best of the modern comic university novels, it is apparently the most popular, as evidenced by its inclusion on *TIME*'s list of the 100 best English-language novels from 1923 to the present⁴² and its publication in the Penguin 20th Century Classics series. It is so well-covered (and not just in the discourse on university fiction) that it scarcely need be discussed here, but while it ostensibly is about working-class Jim Dixon's struggle in a university filled with aristocratic, ineffectual dons such as Professor Welch, a name not

⁴¹ Raymond Postgate, *The Ledger is Kept*, Michael Joseph, London, 1953, p. 74

⁴² “ALL TIME 100 Novels – TIME critics Lev Grossman and Richard Lacayo pick the 100 best English-Language novels from 1923 to present”
<http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/completelist/0,29569,1951793,00.html>

without significance, the culture of Oxbridge still pervades the novel. During an early conversation with Welch, Dixon laments the loss of “the way history might be talked about in Oxford and Cambridge quadrangles” despite the established fact that Oxford and Cambridge most likely would be full of pompous dilettantes like Welch.⁴³ He jealously asks himself why he was not born to wealthy parents like Michel Welch.⁴⁴ Still, if Dixon flirts with the prestige of Oxbridge, it is overall the cause of much anxiety throughout the novel. Welch ties Dixon's academic qualifications to “an intangible, all-embracing appreciation of culture”⁴⁵ to such an extent that it leads to Dixon lamenting the perceived fact that “[n]obody who can't tell a flute from a recorder can be worth hearing on the price of bloody cows under Edward the Third.”⁴⁶ Dixon's outburst skewers Arnoldian notions of cultural capital by pointing out the tenuous relationship between culture and intellectualism, which is further emphasised by the exaggerated qualities of Welch, who begins the novel by bitterly complaining that a local reporter wrote that he was playing a flute at a recent concert, when in fact he played recorder. This prompts a lengthy monologue on the subtle differences between the two instruments, with Welch's convictions seeming incompatible with Arnold's “idea of a perfected humanity” because of their extremely low relevance to any other area. Welch further satirises Arnold's arguments because his sense of culture is based more on his wealth than on any cultivated taste and, as Rossen notes, his quibbling over the recorder “is ironic, since a recorder is an “English” (i.e., not German, transverse) flute”,⁴⁷ which adds ignorance to his list of unflattering character traits. In his portrayal of university dons through Welch, Amis provides a subtle, multi-layered reduction of the prestige of Oxbridge that renders Arnold's arguments laughable, making it plain to see why campus farce has become a popular format.

⁴³ Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*, The Camelot Press Ltd., Great Britain, 1953, 1968, p. 8

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182

⁴⁵ Janice Rossen, *The University in Modern Fiction*, Macmillan Press Ltd., Great Britain, 1993, p. 78

⁴⁶ *Lucky Jim*, p. 24

⁴⁷ *The University in Modern Fiction*, p. 77

Oxbridge and Foreigners

Clearly there is a significant body of criticism devoted to university fiction and academic culture in England, but what happens when foreigners gain entry to the citadel? Showalter takes exception to Lodge's view that Morris Zapp embodies the essence of the American doctorate student, claiming, as a former American doctorate student herself, that they "often take their values from Oxbridge,"⁴⁸ in an unsurprising revelation. Showalter also discusses the explicit parallel between Zapp and noted literary theorist Stanley Fish, which is fully acknowledged by Lodge. Lodge claims that he chose to use Fish as an inspiration because he "was a very glamorous figure" who "was completely unawed by European culture,"⁴⁹ in other words, the antithesis of the archetypal Oxbridge student. Lodge is something of a curiosity in university fiction, for in his novels he seems to have no agenda outside telling a good story, which he explains in an interview:

I don't think that in good faith I could satirize in a destructive way an institution which I belong to. I think I can stand back from the academic profession enough to see its absurd and ridiculous aspects, but I don't think it's really wicked or mischievous.⁵⁰

As Showalter notes, Lodge's writing stands out because of his lack of cynicism and sourness,⁵¹ yet he is still observant enough to lampoon the sillier side of campus life even if he uses the university primarily as a backdrop, rather than a muse, for his gentle romances and sordid affairs. Still, the respectful ribbing that infects his writing can be seen as

⁴⁸ *Faculty Towers*. 64

⁴⁹ Larissa MacFarquhar, "The Dean's List: The Enfant Terrible of English Lit Grows Up," *The New Yorker*, June 11, 2001, pp. 65-66

⁵⁰ David Lodge, interview with John Haffenden, *Novelists in Interview*, Methuen, London, 1985, p. 161

⁵¹ *Faculty Towers*, p. 62

representative of academia as the writing of any other university novelist, even if certain portrayals are at odds with reality.

Zapp/Fish is but one example, however, and while there is a respectable amount of criticism on American university fiction, most of the critics discussed tend to maintain their focus on England. Carter, however, devotes an entire chapter (“Barbarous Foreigners”) to the impact of other nationalities on Oxbridge culture, using the term “barbarous”, as he does elsewhere in his study, to signify the perceived threat to Oxbridge ideals that foreigners embody. This “threat” seems to depend on point of origin; in university fiction, if a student is Serbian or Turkish, for example, or American like Zapp, they are often treated as harmless oddities, but if a student is from a country colonised by the British, they “are worth no more than open contempt.”⁵² Subsequently, Oxbridge novels dealing with colonial students show them being deliberately marginalised by their British peers, such as the rugby-playing Rhodes Scholar in Timothy Robinson's *When Scholars Fall* (1961) who is told that “[i]t's the same with all these colonials...no imagination.”⁵³ This is somewhat paradoxical, for the colonials come to Oxbridge in order to become British, yet are openly chastised for doing so, but the paradox can be overcome by an act of deference, such as with Rudyard Parkinson in *Small World*, “a South African who came to Oxford at the age of twenty-one and perfected an impersonation of Englishness that is now indistinguishable from authentic specimens.”⁵⁴ As Carter puts it, “even the crassest colonial can be inducted to Oxbridge given time on the institution's side

⁵² *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 180

⁵³ Timothy Robinson, *When Scholars Fall*, Hutchison, London, 1961, p. 149

⁵⁴ *Small World*, p. 99

and deference on the postulant's,"⁵⁵ which shows that impersonating the aforementioned "BBC voice" can be appropriated by British and non-British alike.

Yet Carter devotes the bulk of this chapter to university literature from and about the colonies themselves, positing that Australia is the "major literary counter-state to England."⁵⁶ Michael Innes/J.I.M. Stewart, Carter's university novelist par excellence, provides support of this notion in novels such as *Lament for a Maker* (1938) and *Appleby on Ararat* (1941), with the former offering a negative portrayal of Australia and the latter praising the country's similarities to Britain. In *Lament for a Maker*, Ranald Guthrie attempts suicide upon his first glimpse of Fremantle,⁵⁷ presumably sharing the opinion of a character in another Innes novel who "was appalled that such places could exist."⁵⁸ Mr Hoppo in *Appleby on Ararat*, however, feels that when in Melbourne, "one might almost be in – well, in Glasgow,"⁵⁹ hinting at the influence of British culture on colonised countries. Still, these examples neglect to comment on academic culture in Australia, and other portrayals, like those found in Lodge and Howard Jacobson, respectively focus on the climate and the attractive women,⁶⁰ suggesting that perhaps there is little in Australian academia to interest a university novelist. Is it possible that the culture of Oxbridge has failed to make an impact on Australia's academic culture? Whatever the extent of Oxbridge's influence on Australia may be, it is clear when analysing the three authors mentioned above, particularly Joseph and Davin, that the values of Oxbridge have significantly impacted academic culture in New Zealand, but first we must turn our attention to the broader anti-intellectualism which began with the first immigrants to

⁵⁵ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 187

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181

⁵⁷ Michael Innes, *Lament for a Maker*, Four Square Books, London, 1938, 1964, p. 121

⁵⁸ Michael Innes, *Stop Press*, Gollancz, London, 1939, 1971, p. 75

⁵⁹ Michael Innes, *Appleby at Ararat*, Gollancz, London, 1941, 1972, p. 7

⁶⁰ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 185

this country in order to properly appreciate how these attitudes towards intellectualism have impacted the ideologies of New Zealand university culture.

Chapter 1: 'Trying to be superior' – Attitudes Towards Academia in M.K. Joseph's *A Pound of Saffron*

Now that the origins and present state of the British tradition of university fiction have been discussed, the New Zealand equivalent to this tradition can be explored. Like a lot of New Zealand's cultural attitudes, our ideals about academia have been developed from traditional English views; however, because of the nature of the initial emigration from England to New Zealand, these values have come through a distorted lens. Rather than embracing Oxbridge culture, the first settlers in New Zealand opted to reject intellectualism in favour of the hard labour required by most men of the time. This led to early settlers upholding physical labour and other associated activities such as sport (especially rugby), excessive drinking and womanising as endemic to New Zealand masculinity while undermining more cerebral pursuits such as reading, writing and other forms of creative expression. Stifled by this ideology, artfully-minded New Zealand men aired their frustrations in their literature, leading Kai Jensen to argue for the existence of a masculine tradition in New Zealand literature that can almost serve as autobiography. These frustrations include a broad anti-intellectualism like that portrayed in Maurice Gee's *In My Father's Den* (1972), for example, and in Greg McGee's *Foreskin's Lament* (1981), where university education is seen as a threat to masculinity and more. When we turn to academic authors such as M.K. Joseph, Dan Davin and James K. Baxter, however, we find a desire to confront and explore academic life in New Zealand with more curiosity than fear. Joseph and Davin spent time at Oxford, but while Davin felt a conflict between his origins in New Zealand and his time at Oxford, Joseph was better placed to explore Oxbridge experience in a local context. His novel *A Pound of Saffron*

(1962) contains more pressing concerns for academic culture in this country and thus will serve as a starting point for discussion of New Zealand university fiction once the representations of anti-intellectualism in Jensen's tradition have been explored.

Bill Pearson on New Zealand Masculinity

In his famous essay “Fretful Sleepers” (1952), Bill Pearson singles out some of the more curious aspects of “the New Zealand character” in an attempt “to distinguish between what are permanent or emergent traits in New Zealanders” and,⁶¹ of those, which traits are general, which are native to certain localities, and which are merely projections of the author's own shortcomings. A recurring theme of Pearson's observations is the inherent suspicion of anything which is “any variation from the norm” common in mainstream New Zealand society,⁶² with fear being the usual progenitor of this unease.⁶³ Yet while Pearson is ostensibly referring to 'the New Zealand character', his underlying concern is to engage with the masculine New Zealand character and its implications for artistic men such as himself, particularly the suspicion with which intellectuals are regarded, as in Pearson's recollection of being told that he “was due to come a big thud” by a sprayer at the garage where he worked if he dared to “improve their English” as the foreman jokingly suggested.⁶⁴ Pearson attributes this need for uniformity to several factors, such as a desire to live a carefree life devoid of trouble and conflicting opinions,⁶⁵ and his analysis, complemented by histories of Pakeha masculinity such as Jock Phillips' *A Man's Country?* (1987, 1996) and Michael King's *One of*

⁶¹ Bill Pearson, “Fretful Sleepers: A Sketch of New Zealand Behaviour and its Implications for the Artist”, pp. 1-32 in *Fretful Sleepers and other essays*, Heinemann Educational Books, Auckland, 1974, p. 1

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 6

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 7

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2

the Boys? (1988), demonstrates the extent to which this push for homogeneity is an ideological construct that has permeated our culture for generations. “‘Being different’ in New Zealand means ‘trying to be superior’”,⁶⁶ writes Pearson, and in the early stages of this country's development few were more different than the intellectual, a fact which has been well-documented in our literature.

Breaking the Effeminate Chains

“Beginnings”, writes Phillips, “are always shrouded in mystery”,⁶⁷ and the origins of New Zealand's cultural ideologies are no different. In 1857 Charles Hursthouse wrote a two-volume guide for emigrants to New Zealand in which he praised the “happy escape...from that grinding, social serfdom, those effeminate chains” he saw as his “born and certain lot in England”,⁶⁸ positing Australasia as an ideal place to reaffirm his masculinity in the face of the increasing number of men in urban and sedentary occupations which he saw as a threat to the deeply-entrenched gender roles of Victorian Britain. However, Phillips opines that “much of the male stereotype in New Zealand was clearly an amplification of the ‘Home’ experience”,⁶⁹ which complicates Hursthouse's description of this country, since for him an amplification of the ‘Home’ experience would presumably mean more of the “male friends in petticoats” he mentions.⁷⁰ Phillips clarifies by explaining that “what was amplified and what was discarded depended very much on the particular conditions here”; since the conditions here necessitated much physical labour, Hursthouse frames emigration to New Zealand as a method of

⁶⁶ “Fretful Sleepers,” p. 6

⁶⁷ Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male – A History*, Penguin Books, Auckland, 1987, 1996, p. 4

⁶⁸ Charles Hursthouse, *New Zealand or Zealandia, The Britain of the South*, vol. 2, London, 1857, pp. 659-660

⁶⁹ *A Man's Country?*, p. 4

⁷⁰ *New Zealand or Zealandia, The Britain of the South*, pp. 659-660

reinstating masculine pride and identity through “muscular jobs in the fields”, as was done by men in Britain “before the advent of market specialisation”.⁷¹ In short, life in New Zealand was seen as a return to traditional masculine roles of physical labour, and this “man's country” provided men like Hursthouse with the means to re-establish themselves as traditional men, although this ruggedness had an unfortunate side effect.⁷²

Phillips portrays the first colonisers of New Zealand as hard workers who, “[f]aced with the extreme nature of their environment,” had little to no regard for intellectual skills and book-learning.⁷³ In these early days versatility was key, for the newly arrived settler would have to chop down trees, dig railway tracks, sluice gravel, construct huts, plant crops and drive sheep,⁷⁴ and that was only if they worked on farmland instead of trying their luck at gold-mining⁷⁵ or whaling.⁷⁶ This left little room for more specialised knowledge and those who demonstrated themselves as intellectuals were treated with suspicion because of the impracticality of their education. Also, their isolation on the frontier led to an irreconcilable gap between early colonists and “institutions of culture”,⁷⁷ such as museums, galleries and bookshops, meaning that not even an interest in the arts, for example, was anywhere near the experience of the average colonial. Those colonists who did maintain an interest in the arts were often university-educated in England, like George Chamier and Samuel Butler, two literary men who “often found little respect” for their training on the colonial frontier.⁷⁸

⁷¹ *A Man's Country?*, p. 4, p. 5

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 4

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 24

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25

Chamier's novels, *Philosopher Dick* (1891) and *A South-Sea Siren* (1895), “spelt out something of the realities of colonial life,”⁷⁹ with autobiographical details borrowed from the nine years he spent in North Canterbury. Much of the comedy of these two novels derives from Chamier's exploration of the dissonance between his protagonist's rich, self-sustaining inner life of the mind and these realities, represented by fences “hung with reeking sheepskins” and “the slaughteryard, with its blood-stained scaffold.”⁸⁰ Also utilising autobiographical detail, Butler provides another vivid portrait of early colonial life with his assertion in 1868 that

New Zealand seems far better adapted to develop and maintain in that health the physical than the intellectual nature. The fact is, people here are busy making money; that is the inducement which led them to come in the first instance, and they show their sense by devoting their energies to work...But it does not do to speak about John Sebastian Bach's *Fugues*, or pre-Raphaelite pictures.⁸¹

Butler's impression of masculine New Zealand culture in the 19th century is similar to Pearson's treatment of the same culture in 1952, suggesting that, even while the frontier was being tamed, these original tenets of New Zealand masculinity have persevered throughout our history with only slight alterations.

⁷⁹ Patrick Evans, *The Long Forgetting: Post-colonial literary culture in New Zealand*, Canterbury University Press, Christchurch, 2007, p. 118

⁸⁰ George Chamier, *Philosopher Dick: Adventures and contemplations of a New Zealand shepherd*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1891, p. 6

⁸¹ Samuel Butler, *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, London, 1868, p. 50

New Zealand Men in the Twentieth Century

By the 1950s New Zealand men were “[g]rowing fat in sedentary urban jobs”,⁸² so the image of the frontier male, or rather the myth it had become by this point, was embraced as a way for working males with families to feel like one of Barry Crump's 'good keen men'.

Embodying this stereotype meant being “strong, resilient and modest” and presumably meant a resurgence of early colonial attitudes towards education,⁸³ and studies of New Zealand masculinity appear to support this theory. Most of the case studies in Alison Gray's *The Jones Men* (1983) are ambivalent about their formative education (“Didn't like school, full stop” is a typical comment)⁸⁴ and only 23 out of the 100 men interviewed achieved the required marks to enter university, with only eight of them actually completing degrees.⁸⁵ Despite this apparent disadvantage however, over half the Jones men found work (often a job offer was the motivation to quit schooling) and were able to live satisfactory lives like their pioneering forebears, once again relegating formal education and artistic interests to the realm of impractical knowledge. In its place, playing or watching rugby emerged as the pre-eminent leisure activity among New Zealand men because it allowed for the interaction between the “desire to keep alive the muscular virtues of the pioneer heritage, and the concern to contain that masculine spirit within respectable boundaries” that Phillips sees as key to the formation of the Pakeha male stereotype.⁸⁶ According to some of the Jones men participation in rugby was enforced quite aggressively, with “Sam” (35) saying that “[y]ou played rugby unless you had a doctor's certificate” and another man stating that “you just ruddy well played unless

⁸² *A Man's Country?*, p. 266

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 267

⁸⁴ Alison Gray, *The Jones Men: 100 New Zealand men talk about their lives*, A.H. & A.W. Reed Ltd., Wellington, 1983, p. 17

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26

⁸⁶ *A Man's Country?*, p. 86

you were crippled”,⁸⁷ showing how these rigid masculine ideologies are ingrained and normalised during formative years. Because of this emphasis on work, rugby and other physical activity, intellectual or artistic men were often maligned by their more traditionally masculine peers. This rivalry was largely amicable and treated lightly as in Pearson's garage example, but, as can be seen in that same example, the conflict can intensify once a higher education is mentioned.

In Michael King's *One of the Boys?* (1988), Spiro Zavos articulates the difference between rugby and academia:

And yet some people who modestly accept the title of 'academics' dismiss rugby as a 'game for mugs'. What they forget is that there are no ivory towers for players. The players have to perform in front of knowledgeable crowds who demand success. What would happen to our academics if the same pressures were placed on them? Let a fullback take his eye off the ball just once as the stampeding pack of opposition forwards bears down on him, and he is branded as being 'unreliable' for life. How many mistakes do academics make before they are made accountable for their ignorance?⁸⁸

It is hard to read Zavos' use of “ivory towers” as snide, for while this oft-cited phrase is usually employed to attack a university's prestige, in this case it is used to highlight the isolation of academics from society. Rugby players earn Zavos' respect because they have proven themselves in front of countless spectators, whereas academics have no obvious way to gauge and communicate their successes or failures to mainstream New Zealand. In Zavos we have a summation of a main tenet of New Zealand masculinity: “the ultimate joy of

⁸⁷ *The Jones Men*, p. 29

⁸⁸ Spiro Zavos, “In Praise of Rugby”, pp. 108-20 in Michael King, *One of the Boys? Changing Views of Masculinity in New Zealand*, Heinemann Publishers, Auckland, 1988, p. 119

rugby, and its merit as a forge of male character, is that it has a moral dimension.”⁸⁹ Arnold may have seen a liberal university education as a necessary step towards the idea of a perfect humanity, but for Zavos and scores of other New Zealand men, there is no greater proving ground than the rugby field.

Masculinity in New Zealand Literature

While the aforementioned studies of masculinity have provided a brief portrait of the masculine New Zealand character, they are problematic in reflecting the attitudes of mainstream society. Jensen takes King's essay collection to task for including no “working men” and for only including two Maori men, both of whom came from farming backgrounds “but were now prominent public figures”.⁹⁰ Gwendoline Smith's *Will the Real Mr New Zealand Please Stand Up?* (1990) also draws Jensen's ire for including only one manual worker, Joe, among her sixteen profiles of men, and putting his story first, which “gives the impression that Smith deals with men from a wide range of backgrounds”,⁹¹ when Jensen feels she has not done this at all. Jensen acknowledges similar problems with Phillips and, especially considering that academics (including himself) make up the bulk of King's contributors, his point about accounts of New Zealand masculinity being primarily concerned with a minority of the male population is vital to our understanding of the tension between academia and the mainstream. While Smith and Phillips have written books attempting to properly understand the New Zealand male character, essentially they are only writing for other academics and this renders their findings somewhat limited. King fares better by virtue of allowing contributors to write their own essay, but despite the accessibility of most of the

⁸⁹ “In Praise of Rugby,” p. 120

⁹⁰ *Whole Men*, p. 14

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14

writing there is still scant insight into the mind of the average New Zealand man. Instead of relying on this burgeoning canon, Jensen proposes utilising masculine literature as a way of understanding working class males because the tradition constructed by the writers he analyses explores “masculine stances and masculinist statements as a source of subversive potential and of literary energy” that falls short of reflecting what actually happens in New Zealand society but is nonetheless potentially able to predict how society will understand itself once these literary portrayals influence the cultures on which they comment.⁹²

“It's possible”, writes Jensen, “that writers like Sargeson, rather than simply recording and reflecting popular masculinity...,actively shaped a 'tradition' about New Zealand manhood, which was then picked up, amplified and broadcast” throughout our culture, with “journalists, disk jockeys, politicians, sports writers” and “advertising agencies” propagating this 'tradition'.⁹³ As it is with the relationship between academic culture and university fiction, the masculine culture of New Zealand is shaped as it is being reported on and, while the tradition laid out by Jensen focuses more on exploring “typical” New Zealand men than on the world of educated men, a subtle trend towards anti-intellectualism is apparent. This anti-intellectualism appears most commonly in first-hand accounts from the authors themselves: A.R.D. Fairburn noted that the majority of New Zealanders “feel a certain diffidence about trying to improve their speech” because “[t]hey are afraid of being mistaken for pansies or social-climbers”;⁹⁴ Kevin Ireland recalls his father using the term 'snivelling bookworm' “when he got really wound up”;⁹⁵ Sargeson expresses relief at finding his literary tastes

⁹² *Whole Men*, p. 8, p. 18

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 17

⁹⁴ A.R.D. Fairburn, 'Spoken English' in *The Woman Problem and other prose*, B. & J. Paul, Auckland, 1967, pp. 102-103, quoted in *Whole Men*, p. 35

⁹⁵ Kevin Ireland, “One of the Bohemians”, pp. 88-107 in *One of the Boys?*, p. 95, quoted in *Whole Men*, p. 35

agreeable to his new friend Harry because he “was in no doubt about the country [he] lived in” and knew he could think himself lucky that Harry “had been politely indifferent” about his particular peccadilloes.⁹⁶

When it comes to the fiction in the tradition however, the anti-intellectual sentiment is often replaced or merged with a resistance to expressive speech and creativity on the part of traditional New Zealand men. A tailor in a Sargeson novel tells the well-built protagonist that he “can get away with anything” because of his size and masculine status, whereas a “poor willow wand” like himself has to be “careful about letting the artistic temperament out”.⁹⁷ Hogan, a rugby player in a Davin story, thinks one of his team-mates “wasn't a bad little joker” despite having a sharp tongue, adding that “[i]t was hard not to be a jiber if you were a small man where everyone was expected to be big”;⁹⁸ in effect, his expressive speech is justified by his perceived inadequacies. Both examples point to the physical size of a New Zealand man and how it relates to his masculinity, namely in the sense that the bigger a man is physically, the more masculine he is considered to be. However, as Pearson points out, New Zealand men who, like Sargeson's tailor, have an artistic temperament are treated with suspicion and have to work hard to legitimise themselves, or are at least expected to do so, in a culture which highly values physical prowess to the exclusion of almost any other area of expertise. Two of the best examples of this suspicion can be seen in Maurice Gee's *In My Father's Den* (1972) with the treatment of Paul Prior, and in Greg McGee's *Foreskin's Lament* (1981) with the internal turmoil of its eponymous character.

⁹⁶ Frank Sargeson, *Sargeson*, Penguin, Auckland, 1981, p. 190, quoted in *Whole Men*, p. 35

⁹⁷ Frank Sargeson, *Memoirs of a Peon*, MacGibbon & Kee, London, 1965, p. 205

⁹⁸ Dan Davin, *Roads From Home*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1976, p. 34

Anti-intellectualism in Gee and McGee

Even if the titular “father's den” of Gee's novel was not symbolically located in a poison shed, there is still plenty of anti-intellectual literary energy to be found, such as in Charlie's feeling that Paul's immersion into literature is “no way to spend your life,”⁹⁹ or in Andrew's similar opinion that Paul is wasting his time with “[a] room full of books.”¹⁰⁰ In a reversal of Arnold's championing of high culture as a training ground for upstanding citizens, Paul's love of literature leads his brother to think of him as uncivilised because of the “[f]ilth” he enjoys reading in what is possibly an example of intensifying the 'Home' experience as Phillips describes.¹⁰¹ The “repressive, Calvinist-derived, Protestant religion” practised by Andrew and Mrs. Prior was “imported into New Zealand by the early settlers” and,¹⁰² while those ideologies held strong during the first half of the twentieth century, Arnoldian notions of the power of culture failed to have as big an impact, to the presumed chagrin of literary men such as Gee. Andrew's repressive puritanism leads him to murder Celia, as damning a condemnation of puritan values as any, yet while Gee criticises the role of puritanism in our culture, the alternative end of the binary that is academia does not get the most flattering representative in Paul, who shows himself to be as cunning as the scholars in Chaucer. Describing his teenage years, Paul unapologetically retells how he would swot down by the creek, which is a euphemism for “read George Eliot”,¹⁰³ while his girlfriends would competitively work in his fruit stall, and when Celia wins prizes for English and French, Paul sees her parents and remembers that he has “the means to hurt them” through her.¹⁰⁴ Both examples point to Paul's manipulative streak as he guiltlessly convinces his girlfriends to

⁹⁹ Maurice Gee, *In My Father's Den*, Penguin Books, Auckland, 1972, 2004, p. 117

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 124

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 86

¹⁰² Alistair Fox, *The Ship of Dreams: Masculinity in Contemporary New Zealand Literature*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 2008, p. 37

¹⁰³ *In My Father's Den*, p. 84

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 114

work for him *pro bono* and maps out methods for using Celia similarly, yet it is only at the novel's epilogue, in which he mourns the loss of his books more than the loss of Celia,¹⁰⁵ that his detachment from humanity becomes evident.

For better or worse however, Paul is a symbol of intellectualism and culture in Gee's novel and for that he suffers the opinions of Andrew and Charlie, but it is only the latter who directly references academia. Charlie, unable to accept Celia's passion for literature, blames the books Paul lends her for putting "crappy ideas in her head" about "going to university", which he feels "never got anyone anywhere."¹⁰⁶ While not explicitly invoked, the notion of Celia 'trying to be superior' is implied in Charlie's outburst, as he realises that he cannot make her finish after School Certificate and work in his shop like one of the Jones men, so chooses Paul as his target because of the opportunities he represents. This fear is often seen in portrayals of a student's parents in New Zealand literature, but this can sometimes be mixed with a confusion similar to Joyce's when she "couldn't comprehend an arts degree" because she needs to know "What do you do it *for*?",¹⁰⁷ which makes the indignation sympathetic. As Davin's 'jiber' can justify his expressiveness, Joyce needs Paul to justify his academic interests to her in terms she can appreciate, and in the absence of such a justification she is unable to grasp his reasons for pursuing a university career. Here, we see these attitudes represented as being not purely in the domain of masculine society but also as being felt by New Zealand women, most likely because of their husband's or father's influence, showing that the status of universities in New Zealand in most of the twentieth century was nothing like the status enjoyed by Oxbridge.

¹⁰⁵ *In My Father's Den*, p. 175

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91 (author's italics)

With its debut in 1980, McGee's *Foreskin's Lament* showed that this trend had not changed since the 1960s of Gee. By filling his play with characters similar to Zavos, McGee deftly articulates the importance of rugby for men like Tupper and Clean and, conversely, the equal measure of disdain heaped upon Foreskin's academic pursuits. Apart from Larry and Irish, Foreskin's team-mates feel that going to university has put some "funny ideas" into his head, ideas he "has to get rid of" if he wants to stay on the team.¹⁰⁸ Tupper's opinions are reminiscent of Charlie's in Gee, with the father/son dynamic between Tupper and Foreskin emphasising this similarity, although with McGee there is the team's well-being at stake in addition to the well-being of paternal relationships. Tupper knows that his authority as coach can be undermined by Foreskin's "funny ideas" and so finds them threatening in the familiar fashion. It is perhaps for this reason that Larry suggests that Foreskin play rugby for the university team, an idea Foreskin rejects:

I like coming back here a couple of times a week, keeping some involvement, Oh, I know I couldn't live here again, but Jesus (sic) Larry, you've no idea what it's like up there in the ivory tower.¹⁰⁹

To Foreskin, playing rugby is a way to stay connected to his roots in an effort to stop himself from 'trying to be superior', but it is clear from his criticisms of Tupper's coaching that rugby is not the haven for Foreskin that it is for the others,¹¹⁰ as he is unable to fit comfortably into the role because of his education and the wider awareness it grants him. Yet he feels isolated at university, "up there in the ivory tower", so it is impossible for him to wholly commit to

¹⁰⁸ Greg McGee, *Foreskin's Lament*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1981, p. 48

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 36

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-54

one world or the other, leaving him trapped in a limbo well-known to articulate New Zealand men.

The famous resistance to expressive speech is also seen in McGee's play, and is even bewailed by Irish, who remarks that "intelligent conversation at the bottom of the ruck was not unknown" back in Ireland,¹¹¹ criticising another selective appropriation of the "Home" experience. Typically, New Zealand men have co-opted the brutality of rugby without leaving room for the art of conversation, instead preferring to "[k]ick shit out of everything."¹¹² Even when Ken attempts to help Tupper he can only respond to his strategy by disregarding Ken's "bloody calculator stuff",¹¹³ and Foreskin fares no better in his attempts to explain social responsibility to the team. Once again a binary is set up with the educated and the "average" man at opposing ends, as evidenced by Tupper's dismissive attitude towards the doctor who tells Ken to hold off training: "These bloody quacks have never even played the game!"¹¹⁴ Tupper's faith in the game means that knowledge of rugby is the ultimate authority; no matter how knowledgeable the doctor may be, in Tupper's mind he cannot know about injuries because he lacks Tupper's first-hand experience, which in his opinion negates the doctor's expertise. However, while Tupper may have ideological reasons for disapproving of the doctor's advice, his main motivation can most likely be derived from the fact that the doctor is asking Ken to abstain from play, which does not suit Tupper's needs. The same goes for Foreskin's opinions; even though Foreskin is sincerely trying to offer constructive criticism, Tupper can only call him a "free spirit poofter",¹¹⁵ emasculating

¹¹¹ *Foreskin's Lament*, p. 23

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 45

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 46

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 48

Foreskin so he can no longer be perceived as a threat to rugby. Perhaps it is this emasculation which leads to Foreskin to chide “effete intellectuals” (himself among them) who “indulge in polite proselytising bounded by petty rules of good form”,¹¹⁶ although he ultimately rejects rugby in light of Ken's death and ends the play with his titular lament on the violent nature of the game. The play's brutal ending seems to be an extreme example of what occurs in locker rooms and on the field, yet the general consensus among former All Blacks was that McGee “got it right”,¹¹⁷ reinforcing the idea of the masculine tradition in New Zealand literature as a fair, if not entirely accurate, representation of masculine society and all which that entails.

Now that the anti-intellectualism in this tradition has been covered, let us refine our focus to the New Zealand university novel and how it reflects societal attitudes towards academia.

Carter on the New Zealand University Novel

While Carter's study initially suggests an absence of Oxbridge ideals in British colonies like Australia, Canadian author Robertson Davies “out-Oxbridges Oxbridge novels”¹¹⁸ with *The Rebel Angels* (1981), which Carter considers a “pastiche of many kinds of Oxbridge novel”,¹¹⁹ showing that the culture of Oxbridge can infiltrate the literary discourse of colonies. New Zealand is no different, although the list of authors is short. Wayne Innes' *The Department* (1983) is among the more recent examples of New Zealand university fiction, although it is flawed, mainly because of Innes' “anti-feminist obsessions” which “lead him to

¹¹⁶ *Foreskin's Lament*, p. 68

¹¹⁷ Phil Gifford, *NZ Listener*, 10 Jan. 1981, p. 32

¹¹⁸ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 189

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 188

blow the chance to write a good British-style university novel.”¹²⁰ C.K. Stead's *The Death of the Body* (1986) is also a misstep, although Carter's analysis casts it in an intriguing light which its author is unlikely to have anticipated. In keeping with Stead's oeuvre, the novel is ambitious and bold in its attempt to appropriate traditions of the British university novel whilst simultaneously transcending them, such as the traditional mysterious death found in British university detective novels. However, in attempting to embrace post-structuralism, “the latest critical windsurfer” at the time, he unfortunately delivers an “internally incoherent” narrative,¹²¹ a move not too dissimilar from the actions so often lampooned in academic fiction.

Of far greater esteem in Carter's opinion is Davin the notable expatriate, even if he is, along with Innes, “scarcely worth reading unless one is writing a book on university fiction”.¹²² Davin was famously Oxford-educated after winning a Rhodes scholarship in 1935 and, in his writing, seemed until the end to be caught between the ideals of Oxbridge culture and those of New Zealand in ways which will be analysed more explicitly in due course. Whereas Davin attempts to create a new form of university novel with an unmistakably indigenous flavour, M. K. Joseph, another Oxford man, successfully achieved Stead's apparent goal of appropriating traditions of British university fiction whilst expanding the model to include local concerns. Set in a fictionalised Auckland University, *A Pound of Saffron* (1962) is “the best of the lot” for its upheaval of the British model by swapping the perceived threat of working-class Oxbridge on collegiate Oxbridge with a difficult merging of Maori Auckland

¹²⁰ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 191

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 194

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 192

and Pakeha Auckland.¹²³ Before dealing with this issue however, Joseph gets in an early dig at the British structure of New Zealand university culture in this overheard snippet of pre-meeting talk amongst lecturers:

“...Personally, I think it's high time we gave something of a truly national character to our Universities. With imported staffs and imported standards, we're out of touch with the broad mass of the people. The average New Zealander won't pay his money to support narrow specialists in ivory towers: what he wants is a broad education for citizenship. That's what our whole democratic way of life demands. A truly New Zealand culture, not a synthetic European one...By the way, have you heard the latest about salary increases...”¹²⁴

The final line could have come directly from Lodge, for it demonstrates a keen sense of irony which he and Joseph share. While ostensibly standing up for “the people”, this lecturer is still primarily concerned with his own salary, showing that he is more a specialist in an ivory tower than a defender of the proletariat. Right from the onset, Joseph's novel reads as a chastisement of traditional Oxbridge ideals committed to protecting the cultural citadel of academia that have been transplanted into New Zealand academic culture. Joseph does this most effectively with the character of James Rankin, the Oxford-educated Professor of European Drama, who proves throughout the novel to have a large capacity for manipulation, one of the more insidious elements of Oxbridge culture.

¹²³ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 192

¹²⁴ M. K. Joseph, *A Pound of Saffron*, Gollancz, London, 1962, pp. 9-10

The British Influence in Joseph

Like Crawford in C. P. Snow's *The Masters* (1951), Rankin “is not above scheming for success”,¹²⁵ and is ambivalent about the way he subtly treats Terry and Linda, the leads of his production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, as pawns in a figurative game of chess more sinister than the actual ones he plays with Professor Eldredge. His lack of empathy can be seen in his thoughts of steering Terry's family rows in “a certain direction”,¹²⁶ the “queer calculus of human grief” he performs in his head after learning of Linda's father's imminent death,¹²⁷ and the way he congratulates himself on being “wise to exploit” the difficulties Terry and Linda face in their personal relationships.¹²⁸ Like Paul Prior, Rankin is hardly a flattering portrayal of an academic, yet while his flair for exploitation is typical of fictional Oxbridge dons, his exposure to campus politics occurred after Oxford, at “a provincial University”.¹²⁹ Despite drawing attention with a “provocative article”, Rankin is passed over in favour of an “older, less talented, more amiable man” because he is seen as “too much of an *arriviste*,”¹³⁰ implying that Rankin is too superior, in the Pearson sense, to gain acceptance at a non-Oxbridge university, as if he is tainted by the influence of Oxford. It is important to note that Rankin meets with difficulty in a provincial, presumably more egalitarian, university after success at Oxford, for it shows that Oxbridge ideals are not necessarily universal to British culture, despite the strong connections between the two.

¹²⁵ Janice Rossen, *The University in Modern Fiction*, Macmillan Press Ltd., Great Britain, 1993, p. 120

¹²⁶ *A Pound of Saffron*, p. 135

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 175

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16, author's italics

This snobbery is a curious reversal of the usual “town and gown” rivalry of the British tradition, as, typically, it is the working-class student or lecturer who is shunned by the intellectual elite; yet, for a New Zealand university novel, it is thematically appropriate, as it is typically the intellectual elite in our tradition who are shunned by working-class society. However, Joseph adopts another aspect of the British tradition in his portrayal of Rankin's mother. Unlike other parents we will see in New Zealand university fiction, Mrs Rankin urges her son to succeed academically in order to achieve a greater social standing, and it is arguably Mrs Rankin's idealisation which leads to Rankin's own relentless pursuit of success. Her idealisation is only briefly mentioned, but considering that Rankin grew up in a “small depression-hit town,”¹³¹ it seems odd that she would push Rankin towards scholarship instead of more practical pursuits, such as finding work like one of the Jones men. Considering the fact that most New Zealand university novels strive for realism and feature parents who possess the oft-cited “tall poppy syndrome”,¹³² this uncharacteristic push for a university education seems to belong more within the British tradition of university fiction, where a student's desire to study is practically never challenged by parental authorities. Additionally, this idealisation of academia is reminiscent of Michael in *Sinister Street*, for Mrs Rankin seems to agree that a good university education will elevate James to a higher level of humanity, with the irony being that he becomes more inhumane through his exposure to, and participation in, campus politics. However, while Rankin makes for a fascinating appropriation of fictional traditions, it is in exploring the tension between intellectual society and working-class New Zealanders where Joseph breaks away from tradition and pursues more relevant concerns.

¹³¹ *A Pound of Saffron*, p. 15

¹³² V. Suchitra Mouly and Jayaram K. Sankaran, “The Tall Poppy Syndrome in New Zealand: An Exploratory Investigation”, University of Auckland, Auckland, 2001, p. ii

Intellectual Tension in Joseph

“I don't object, mind you, but it's not really practical” is how Ted Hollis sees his son's tertiary education,¹³³ echoing a collective attitude common to generations of New Zealand men.

Terry's apparent refusal to adhere to these traditional values is what baffles Ted Hollis the most and, while he launches no attack on Professor Rankin, a conversation between the two shows signs of tension bubbling below his stoic exterior. After wondering aloud if “the Universities and intellectuals generally” are 'teaching' his son to reject his own careerist attitudes,¹³⁴ Ted admits that he would “make it hard” for whoever had put ideas into Terry's head which are not “sound” and “responsible” like the ideas held by the “fine young executives” in Hollis' firm.¹³⁵ In a move typical of Pearson's take on the New Zealand character, Hollis delegates authority to an unknown “they”, referring in this case to the board who oppose Rankin's open-air theatre scheme, those who “spoil what they can't get” and those who “come between father and son”,¹³⁶ a stance that tars every academic with the same brush. The final “they” is of particular interest, for it demonstrates how the responsibility for Hollis' own difficulties is put on the university's shoulders as he opts to blame the “dangerous” academics instead of fully confronting his own inability to relate to his son. This is tragic, as Hollis is unable to understand that, as Rankin points out, the difficulties he has with Terry are universal amongst parents because of a generational gap, rather than having much to do with outside influence.¹³⁷ Additionally, Rankin is somehow excluded from these negative views of academia, with Hollis wishing that there were more academics of Rankin's noble ilk, despite the fact that he is anything but. Much like Robyn and Vic in Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988), Rankin and Hollis maintain a friendship of sorts despite their ideological

¹³³ *A Pound of Saffron*, p. 33

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 98

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98

opposition, and it is perhaps because of this relationship that Hollis trusts Rankin; just as the “more amiable” man bested Rankin at the provincial university, Rankin is more worthy of Hollis' allegiance than Professor Charlton because of their congenial relationship.

Whatever Hollis' reasons for his allegiance to Rankin, this passage underscores how little he understands of universities and how much his prejudice is based on pre-conceived notions. In his conversation with Terry, he mentions that Mrs Hollis wanted him to go university because they both wanted him to “have the things we missed when we were young, culture and all that,”¹³⁸ suggesting that Mr Hollis was never enamoured of the idea of university but paid Terry's tuition regardless in the interest of providing as a father. His casual use of “culture and all that” also implies a vague understanding of what is taught at university, confounding Mr Hollis' frustrations at what is to him an unknown quality. In his conversation with Terry, it is also apparent that the university is a rival for Mr Hollis when his offer of a trip to Taupo before Terry's exam is vetoed in favour of staying home to “get some work done.”¹³⁹ Even though he is not a diligent student, from Mr Hollis' viewpoint Terry is rejecting his father in order to pursue intellectual whims, further exacerbating the tension, although ultimately Mr Hollis is supportive of his son out of paternal love in spite of these difficulties. Mrs Hollis, on the other hand, is entirely more ruthless in her opinions on the university and its influence on Terry's behaviour.

In his chapter on 'Barbarous Women', Carter could easily be referring to any of the disapproving fictional mothers seen in the New Zealand university canon, although Marion

¹³⁸ *A Pound of Saffron*, p. 33

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34

Hollis is arguably more deserving of the title than most. Freshly returned from a trip to England, Marion plays the part of aristocrat over dinner with Terry and Linda, talking “incessantly about subjects involving money” and taking pride in sitting close to the Royal Box during a ballet performance.¹⁴⁰ Mrs Hollis is Victorian in her attitudes, committed to maintaining an appearance of dignity while nurturing racist opinions towards “darkies” and,¹⁴¹ by extension, Linda, Terry's half-Maori girlfriend, implying that she represents these values and their lingering influence on New Zealand culture in the 1960s. However, in the usual manner, faith in English universities is not transferred into Marion's appropriation of British values and she sees tertiary education purely as something with which one can “play around for a few years,” urging Ted to “talk some sense to the boy” when Terry voices his intention to continue to Honours.¹⁴² It is worth noting that this comes after Terry objects to her racist outlook and the following exchange ensues:

“You've changed since I've been away, Terry.”

“Perhaps I have, mother. I can't help growing up, you know.”

“Why of course,” she smiled indulgently, “and we all have to have our own ideas, don't we? But now you've finished with Varsity-”¹⁴³

Like Charlie Inverarity and her husband, Mrs Hollis operates under the assumption that the university is giving Terry dangerous ideas, but unlike the two men she sees his education as a catalyst for their ideological divide instead of viewing it in more concrete terms. While the apparent relationship between Terry's changing attitude and his university education is not made explicit, it can be inferred from the dialogue between Terry and his mother that she sees

¹⁴⁰ *A Pound of Saffron*, p. 157

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 158

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 158

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 158

“Varsity” as somewhat of a corrupting influence, rather than pinning his shift in opinions on the inevitable generational gap. Yet as with the portrayal of Mrs Rankin, this does not quite ring true, for if anyone would want Terry to try to be 'superior' it would surely be Marion, although the connection she makes between Terry's university career and his relationship with Linda allows her disenchantment to make thematic sense, for her concerns there are drawn from more practical origins.

While the Hollises are hardly working-class, they nonetheless embody similar attitudes to contemporary New Zealand society during the 1960s. As well as being disapproving, Marion is also suspicious of the university, as evidenced when Linda points out that “everyone” at the university knows that Terry has done well, only to have Mrs Hollis flippantly respond by saying “Oh, I'm sure they do,” as if the opinions of academics are not to be taken seriously. In Mrs Hollis we see the curious behaviour of disregarding the importance of academia whilst simultaneously finding it threatening; despite his misconceptions, Ted at least has a begrudging acceptance of the university's influence, whereas Marion's viewpoint is irrational and based primarily on the rejection of anything which does not fit comfortably within her principles, which also includes Linda. Linda, by virtue of her ethnicity, is labelled “a Maori tart” by Mrs Hollis, and she blames Terry's “running around with this queer crowd at the Varsity” for his “getting mixed up” with her.¹⁴⁴ This effectively puts responsibility for Terry's courtship of Linda on the university, which naturally exacerbates Terry's frustrations whilst highlighting how Marion's ideological notions of academia have very little to do with reality. In Marion's opinion, Linda is “as dumb as they come, but...smart enough about just one

¹⁴⁴ *A Pound of Saffron*, p. 160

thing”,¹⁴⁵ namely the Hollis' wealth, which Mrs Hollis sees as Linda's primary reason for dating Terry. In actuality, Linda is more studious than Terry and voices no interest in his money, but because of Marion's insecurities about her maternal bond with Terry she is lumped together with the university and considered a corrupting influence, exacerbating Terry's frustrations yet again.

Generational Tensions in New Zealand University Fiction

Terry's problems with his parents is only one of several plots running through Joseph's novel, but while other plotlines, particularly Rankin's manipulation, would fit quite comfortably within the British tradition of university fiction, the portrayal of the Hollis family exemplifies a primary focus of academic fiction in New Zealand. In the brief snapshots of Hollis family life afforded to the reader, the same tension felt between Foreskin and Tupper can be seen in Mr Hollis' relationship with his son, although it should be noted that Tupper lacks the paternal patience shown by Ted. Similarly, the suspicion of intellectuals seen in Gee has a mouthpiece in Mrs Hollis, even if her suspicion has less to do with a fear of dangerous ideas and has more to do with concerns for the family estate. However, while the specific details of the generational tension may change, its existence can scarcely be ignored and rarely is in what few works exist in the New Zealand university canon. While Joseph examines this tension to great effect in *A Pound of Saffron*, it is two other writers, Dan Davin and James K. Baxter, who take it to new lengths; Davin because of the similar tension he felt between himself and his provincial 1930s Catholic family which manifests itself in his university novels and Baxter because of his unique station as the paternal grandson of John Macmillan Brown, a highly influential university professor, and the son of Archie Baxter, an uneducated

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 160

farmer with pacifist leanings and a flair for poetry. Whereas Joseph's novel is of some interest for the purposes of this study, it is really Davin and Baxter who, whether intentionally or not, have laid the foundation for a tradition of university fiction specific to New Zealand and, while *A Pound of Saffron* is generally regarded as this country's first university novel (and perhaps it could continue to be considered so because of its effective aping of the British model), close analysis reveals that Davin may have beaten him to the punch with his debut novel, *Cliffs of Fall* (1945).

Chapter 2: A Shrivelled Navel Cord: Notions of Oxford Prestige and Their Conflict with New Zealand Ideology in the Campus Fiction of Dan Davin

Davin in the Masculine Tradition

While M.K. Joseph's *A Pound of Saffron* is arguably a continuation of the British tradition of university fiction, albeit one showcasing the New Zealand character's take on academia, the novel is somewhat in a league of its own. Matters of class and the symbolic prestige of a university are discussed in Joseph's writing, but his novel is "[m]uch more than an academic novel" because of its treatment of issues to do with "power, personal morality, generational conflict, the arts in New Zealand, racism and biculturalism."¹⁴⁶ In dealing with issues which often come up in the masculine literary tradition in New Zealand, he shies away from the strong realist approach that typifies this tradition, which places the novel in a limbo between the British mode and its local equivalent. Perhaps this can be attributed to Joseph's own precarious place between cultures, as he was born in England and returned there to attend Oxford in 1936 before moving back to Auckland after a decade,¹⁴⁷ although it is most likely owing to the author's insistence that the novel was intended as "a tight plot with simplified

¹⁴⁶ Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1998, p. 449

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 274-275

“humours” characters”, rather than “some kind of *roman à clef*”, as it is often considered.¹⁴⁸

Joseph apparently had no intention to write a traditional university novel, yet the influence of the fictional canon infiltrated his prose, perhaps because of his time spent at Oxford. All of these influences ultimately make his novel somewhat of an anomaly.

Oxbridge culture also infiltrates the writing of Dan Davin, although in ways far less ambiguous. Even though *Cliffs of Fall* (1945) is more an “Elizabethan or Jacobean domestic tragedy” than a proper university novel,¹⁴⁹ Davin's characteristic fawning over Oxbridge makes itself apparent and thus renders the novel a valid entry to the canon. This fawning is continued in the strongly autobiographical *Not Here, Not Now* (1970) and his *professorroman*¹⁵⁰ *Brides of Price* (1972); however, his other writing suggests such a strong empathy with New Zealand culture that he once wrote to Frank Sargeson that he felt “no wish to write about anyone but NZers”, expressing regret over the fact that “the old navel cord is getting more shrivelled” because of his decision to remain in England.¹⁵¹ This tension between the Oxbridge culture he adopted and the colonial culture he was born into seemed to nag at Davin for his entire life, for it was a common preoccupation of his writing and his conversation. It is for this reason that he is a better example of a New Zealand university novelist than Joseph, even though his campus novels “are scarcely worth reading unless one is writing a book about university fiction”,¹⁵² for he fully adopted the realist approach popular in Kai Jensen's masculine tradition and used it to thoroughly explore the generational tension

¹⁴⁸ *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, p. 276

¹⁴⁹ James Bertram, *Dan Davin*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1983, p. 8

¹⁵⁰ Richard G. Caram, “The Secular Priests: A Study of the College Professor as Hero in Selected American Fiction, 1955-1977”, Ph.D. Diss., St. Louis University, 1980

¹⁵¹ Janet Wilson (ed.), *Intimate Stranger – reminiscences of Dan Davin*, Steele Roberts, Wellington, Steele Roberts, 2000, p. 101

¹⁵² *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 192

associated with academia which is unique to New Zealand. Over the first two novels, Davin provides vivid illustrations of the insecurities behind this tension as well as the repercussions of anti-academic attitudes, which makes him arguably the originator of a tradition of New Zealand university fiction nearly two decades before Joseph's contribution, while the third novel shows the extent to which Davin bought into the ideology of Oxford in his later life.

Davin's Attempts At "Wholeness"

In addition to both men being Oxford alumni, Joseph and Davin also had wartime experience in common, with the former author documenting his experience in his "low-key semi-documentary novel" *I'll Soldier No More* (1958)¹⁵³ and the "emotionally powerful and morally complex" *A Soldier's Tale* (1976),¹⁵⁴ and Davin fictionalising his own World War II experiences in *For the Rest of Our Lives* (1947) and two of the twenty-six short stories in *The Gorse Blooms Pale* (1947). With both authors, their writing on war experience earned more acclaim than their campus fiction, with *A Soldier's Tale* often cited as Joseph's best-known work¹⁵⁵ and *For the Rest of Our Lives* drawing considerable critical attention, while Davin's three university novels fell into obscurity.¹⁵⁶ This could be attributable to "a new closeness with ordinary men" which was afforded to literary New Zealand men with their involvement in World War II and led to an intensifying of "the growing masculine excitement in our literature",¹⁵⁷ which allowed writers like Joseph and Davin to empathise strongly with these ordinary men and thus create more satisfying and relevant characterisation in their writing.

¹⁵³ *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, p. 276

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 502

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 274

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131

¹⁵⁷ *Whole Men*, p. 58

Soldiering served as a great equaliser, with Davin recording a sense of humility discovered during his service:

Service in war with the New Zealand Division humbled my arrogance: I lived intimately among men who had no intellectual pretensions but whom I saw to be my superiors in character and in action. And I learnt, too, to relish and admire the language of these men, its aptness to the handling of danger, its grim humour, the marvellous creativity of its slang.¹⁵⁸

With this sympathy for his fellow countrymen in mind, it is plain to see why his war novel and *Roads From Home* (1947), a novel drawn from his formative years in Southland, are among his most celebrated works, with Lawrence Jones referring to the latter as “one of the landmarks in the development of the New Zealand realistic tradition.”¹⁵⁹ Obviously Davin was a writer as well-equipped to document the experiences of typical New Zealanders as his impromptu literary rival Frank Sargeson, yet when he tackled university fiction the results were almost uniformly disappointing. Considering his noted talent as a writer this may seem somewhat inexplicable, but, as we shall see, in adhering to the world of academia and Oxbridge prestige, Davin unwittingly succeeded in alienating himself from mainstream New Zealand, which in turn proved to be a hindrance upon his writing.

Jensen writes of soldiering as “an activity which our writers represent as integral to New Zealand masculinity” that has an additional function as “a ritual of masculinity,”¹⁶⁰ which, as we have seen, could not be said of university enrolment. However, in his war novel, Davin

¹⁵⁸ *Dan Davin*, p. 62

¹⁵⁹ *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, p. 467

¹⁶⁰ *Whole Men*, p. 22

shows how “an intellectual may actually achieve popularity among less well educated New Zealanders if he strikes the right tone”,¹⁶¹ namely when the friend of one of his characters, Tony Brandon, thinks: “Clearly Tony was very popular here as a man always is among New Zealanders if he can put a polysyllabic vocabulary to mock-heroic uses.”¹⁶² With this, Davin comes close to Jensen's “ideal combination of literature and manliness, the whole man”,¹⁶³ but unfortunately he never learned Tony's trick for himself. Because Davin lacked Sargeson's natural affinity for the proletariat, his forays into intellectualism led to an irreconcilable gap between the values of his parents and the values of the academic world. After his first year at Otago University, “he became a stickler for grammatical precision, took pleasure in the correct use of words, was in short a true lover of language,”¹⁶⁴ but a connection with his family had to be sacrificed:

Dan's family was proud of his achievements, but their pride was spiked with gall. To grow away from the simple ordinariness of obscure family life, especially one embedded in the rituals and certainties of a tribal culture, is to commit the sin of success, for which there is rarely forgiveness.¹⁶⁵

As well as exiling him, Davin's unequivocal allegiance with professorial knowledge also hinders his prose, for it lacks the natural ease of Sargeson or Joseph, and from *Cliffs of Fall* we can infer that this tension played somewhat heavily on his mind, even though it led to the novel's most satisfying passages. In *Cliffs of Fall*, as in *A Pound of Saffron*, it is in the

¹⁶¹ *Whole Men*, p. 36

¹⁶² Dan Davin, *For the Rest of Our Lives*, Nicholson, London, 1947, p. 313

¹⁶³ *Whole Men*, p. 59

¹⁶⁴ Keith Ovenden, *A Fighting Withdrawal: The Life of Dan Davin – Writer, Soldier, Publisher*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 60

¹⁶⁵ *A Fighting Withdrawal*, pp. 60-61

interactions between Mark Burke, Davin's stand-in and protagonist, and his family that we see the ideological tension between generations expressed in vividly emotional terms.

Generational Tension in *Cliffs of Fall*

The sacrifice of familial ties is a common problem to students from a working class background, but for a young man from a staunchly Catholic family living on a farm in depression-era Invercargill it must have been especially acute. In Davin's novel, Mark is determined to win a scholarship in order to “leave New Zealand and carve out the career of [his] ambition”,¹⁶⁶ as it promises a permanent escape from his family's disapproval. While Davin himself “simply grew away from his relations” because of his intellectualism,¹⁶⁷ Mark sees himself as being “[l]ike a starving man” who “won't let anything, anyone, stop me,”¹⁶⁸ so at best we can view Mark as a more obsessive stand-in for the author, with Mark's desperation serving to highlight the complex pre-occupations which plagued the young Davin. This is an important distinction to note, for Mark is mostly an unsympathetic character because of the inhuman focus on academic success which leads him to murder his pregnant girlfriend Marta, whereas Davin, for all his personal flaws, was never so cold-blooded. Alternatively, Mark can be seen as a darkly satirical character, for Marta's murder is committed purely because she is an obstacle in his path to scholarship, and it could be argued that he is a premium example of a callous scholar, as seen in *The Merie Tales of Skelton* (1567).¹⁶⁹ Yet when examining the portrayals of Mark's family in the first section of the novel, it becomes

¹⁶⁶ Dan Davin, *Cliffs of Fall*, Nicholson and Watson, London, 1945, p. 40

¹⁶⁷ *A Fighting Withdrawal*, p. 60

¹⁶⁸ *Cliffs of Fall*, p. 40

¹⁶⁹ *The English University Novel*, pp. 17-18

easier to sympathise with Mark as his actions seem less callous and more of a last resort in the face of his family's harsh disapproval. In effect, this makes the Burke family implicit in Mark's self-destruction and addresses the implications of harbouring attitudes resentful of academia like those possessed by the family, so it is with both of these interpretations in mind that we examine the opening section of *Cliffs of Fall*.

Like Marion Hollis in *A Pound of Saffron*, Mark's mother and his sister are well-deserving of the title 'barbarous women'. Typically, novels about Oxbridge “treat women as threatening interlopers”,¹⁷⁰ and right from the start this informal matriarchy impedes on Mark's consciousness. Attempting sleep in his childhood bedroom, Mark overhears his mother talking to his father about how “[i]t was high time he came home from that University”, ostensibly because she believes that they do not “give him enough to eat in those boarding-houses”.¹⁷¹ What initially reads as maternal concern is changed to outright spite by what follows: “There's no food like home food as I'm always telling them and the black stranger will never treat you like your own”. Here the usual unavoidable binary is set up, with Mark's family at one end and the university at the other, and Mark caught in between. The use of the term “black stranger” emphasises this, for, as Donald Harman Akenson points out, the term has its origins “in the Irish lexicon” and usually refers to Protestantism, creating a “black-white, them-us, good-bad mind set,”¹⁷² meaning the university not only symbolises a departure from Mark's working class roots, but his faith as well. From there, his mother goes on:

¹⁷⁰ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 159

¹⁷¹ *Cliffs of Fall*, p. 11

¹⁷² Donald Harman Akenson, *Half the world from home: perspectives on the Irish in New Zealand, 1860-1950*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 1990, p. 103

But they're all the same with their noses buried in books half the time so that you never know what they're thinking about. I'm sure I don't know how we came to have such clever sons and I often wish we hadn't so that we could have some authority over them like other parents.¹⁷³

Mark's mother, feeling her authority threatened, resorts to simplification and tars all students with the same brush, providing another fictional representation of working class New Zealand attitudes towards academia. As well as attacking the ideals of intellectualism, Mrs. Burke nags Mark about going to a local church dance because it would do him “more good than moping around here...all night, poring over books like a hermit”,¹⁷⁴ and proclaims her inability to understand how Mark can simply sit and think, an act she regards with utmost doubt.¹⁷⁵

There is some comedy to be found in her suspicions, such as when she frets over Mark's friend Bob Mooney's “being a bit of a communist” despite having had “a good Catholic education and a good Catholic home and all”,¹⁷⁶ as Mrs. Burke is not altogether unsympathetic but merely misguided. While her protests suggest a 'Town versus Gown' class war, she is really afraid for what might happen to her son in an institution she cannot begin to properly understand. To her, the university can only ever be a symbol, a mysterious monolith, as she lacks the academic intelligence to regard it as anything else. As the matriarch of a

¹⁷³ *Cliffs of Fall*, pp. 11-12

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20

staunchly Catholic family, she can barely tolerate “thinking of all the queer girls he might be meeting up with, with no morals or religion in them at all and him a lad, easily led away”.¹⁷⁷ To her, Mark has eaten from the Tree of Knowledge and so must be ejected from the Eden that is the Burke family's unquestioning Catholic existence. His sister also joins in, chiding Mark for performing a comic impression of the local priest and opining that “[a]ll of them atheists up there in the university are taking your religion away from you, they are”.¹⁷⁸ She also earlier accuses him of “getting too stuck up” for the family and belittles his aspirations: “[i]t's Society we're after now, I suppose.”¹⁷⁹ The capitalisation of “Society” is key, as it shows how it is another symbol the Burkes cannot fully appreciate; while establishing social connections at university is generally to one's great benefit, Mark's sister can only see it as snobbery. However, it must also be remembered that Mark's sister may simply be teasing him as siblings are wont to do, as her attack on the “atheists” at the university imitates Old Mick's comments, and elsewhere she seems to be merely parroting the opinions of her mother. Nonetheless, her comments are extremely irritating to Mark no matter how insincere she may be, and the way he is targeted leads the reader to understand why he would choose to align himself with academia.

Mark muses on the tension between himself and his family at length:

He was divided from his parents by education as well as by...the fact that they were now static in their outlook while his was still shifting and developing. What use would advice be, given from the standpoint of one set of values and standards of conduct, when, had he

¹⁷⁷ *Cliffs of Fall*, p. 15

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 50-1

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22

subscribed in the least to these values and standards, the situation would never have arisen? How could he have accepted their judgement founded though it was on a stable code of behaviour and individual experience when he did not accept that code and looked to a very different world for his experience?¹⁸⁰

This summation of the cavern between students and their working class roots can barely be improved upon, but what is especially worth noting is the indication that Mark has not gravitated away from his parents' influence deliberately. His evolving intellect cannot fit within the narrow restraints of his family's Catholic beliefs, yet simultaneously there is an admission that his "situation" (Marta's impregnation) would not have happened had he shared his parents' faith. There is an extremely subtle criticism of academia evidenced here, as Mark's allegiance with professorial knowledge gets him into trouble that could have been avoided by an adherence to pastoral wisdom, a failure that ultimately leads to his, and Marta's, demise. Also, his stubborn idealisation of the university and what it offers shows that he has more in common with his mother than might be immediately obvious.

Idealisation of the University in *Cliffs of Fall*

If Mark's idealisation of the university has any positive outcome, it is his renewed appreciation for manual labour. After his first night home, Mark enjoys the "harmonious activity that the man of books will always feel in any purely physical movements,"¹⁸¹ on which he ruminates thus:

¹⁸⁰ *Cliffs of Fall*, p. 13

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17

The steady rhythm of the hands' motion, so far from hindering thinking, seemed to promote it, but on such a calm level as he had almost forgotten thinking was possible. It was easy to understand how one's thinking geared at such a gentle pace could become a calm, monotonous mental see-saw, a mere entertaining and contemplation of ideas.¹⁸²

Here Davin romanticises his own pastoral upbringing as he does in *The Gorse Blooms Pale*, only this time he incorporates a relationship between intellectualism and working class ideals. After spending so much time immersed in study, Mark appreciates the simplicity of farm work and finds that it allows for free and easy thought without the constraints of a formal education. As we will see, James K. Baxter felt this form of thinking to be superior to formal study because of its organic nature, but for Mark, this mode is inferior because, while “occupations of the farm” such as milking favour thought, they “favour it at too low a level.”¹⁸³ To Mark, the “absence of conflict” evident in these occupations renders them intellectually unsatisfying because they “would reduce the intellectual process to something little higher than the cud-chewing of the cow herself,”¹⁸⁴ which again illustrates how his idealisation of university values has limited his frame of reference and has left him unable to comprehend the world in non-academic terms. There is also the association between the farm work and Mark's upbringing, for he remembers sitting on the milking stool “on bitter winter mornings”,¹⁸⁵ vowing to himself that “once a man he could leave...the eternal binding rhythm of the milking and free himself for tasks higher though not yet defined.”¹⁸⁶ It would seem

¹⁸² *Cliffs of Fall*, p.17

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 17

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19

from this passage that Mark's idealisation of the university has more to do with its potential for escape from a mundane life than with any long-term desire for a tertiary education.

While Mark can scoff and get angry at the talk of his mother and sister, all three of them are regarding the university as a symbol, with Mark considering it “a complex of cultural forces at large” and his mother thinking it “a vastly powerful surrogate parent figure which denies outside suppliants what they desire”.¹⁸⁷ Like the protagonist of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Mark “attaches himself to the idea of the University because it provides a focus for his dream of gaining recognition”,¹⁸⁸ and creates such an ideal of the university that it strips him of his humanity. As mentioned above, he compares himself to a starving man who “won't let anything, anyone” stop him. He also tells himself that there is “no one who [can]-not be dispensed with and replaced”, especially Marta, as “[h]e had been in love before” and “when it ended his convalescence had always been swift”,¹⁸⁹ positing Marta's murder as a minor necessary sacrifice providing the severance from his family. This coldness is clearly the viewpoint of an unhinged mind, yet, ironically, Mark is ignorant to the implications of the path he is taking until the novel's conclusion, when “[t]he walls of rationalisation...crumpled”, leaving only the fact that he “had killed cold-bloodedly, without mercy and, most bitter, without reason”.¹⁹⁰ In a state of despair and mental dysfunction, he hallucinates a double of himself (the “murderer”) and throws himself at this apparition, only to fall off the cliff face to his death. As Bob tries to warn him, he overestimates his own inhumanity and finds his self-confidence to be greater than his capacity,¹⁹¹ and too late Mark

¹⁸⁷ *The University in Modern Fiction*, p. 11

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15

¹⁸⁹ *Cliffs of Fall*, p. 84

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 167

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40

learns that his attempts to replace emotional intelligence with academic intelligence, rather than use professorial knowledge to accentuate the pastoral wisdom of his youth, bring about a grandiose downfall.

Generational Conflict in *Not Here, Not Now*

While the cruel joke is ultimately on Mark in *Cliffs of Fall*, his idealisation of the university is less the folly of an ignorant mind and more an act of desperation against the restrictive ideologies of his family. Also, Mark's rumination on the "absence of conflict" in the thoughts favoured during farm work is reminiscent of the "wishfully untroubled world" Bill Pearson argues is the ultimate goal of the average New Zealander,¹⁹² implying that the differences between the pastoral world and the academic world are as irreconcilable as the differences between intellectuals and the New Zealand working class. As an intellectual, Mark craves challenging ideas and opinions of a different substance to those of his family, and while his focus on academia ultimately ends in tragedy, his thoughts during milking hint at the possibility of a fusion between intellectualism and pastoral wisdom, providing one brief glimmer of hope in the novel. Such a fusion is also hinted at in Davin's second university novel, *Not Here, Not Now*, which is strongly autobiographical in its painfully-detailed account of Davin's years at Otago University and his determination to become a Rhodes scholar and study at Oxford. The familial pride "spiked with gall" referenced in Davin's biography is evident here, although it is tainted with a generational tension more mild than anything seen in Joseph or *Cliffs of Fall*, for the more pressing concern of *Not Here, Not Now* seems to be Davin's desire to tell the tale of his New Zealand university career, warts and all. As Davin tells his story, concerns associated with the inherited nature of New Zealand culture

¹⁹² "Fretful Sleepers," p. 2

are raised, although the more interesting theme running through this novel is the way in which Davin criticises the nature of Otago University, despite a fawning over Oxbridge ideals that is typical of his work. First, however, it is worth focusing on the way Davin portrays the conflicts with his family in this insightful novel.

Martin Cody, the novel's protagonist and Davin stand-in, gets similar familial treatment to Mark in some instances, such as when his mother tells him that it will do him good to help his father on the farm instead of having his nose “stuck in a book all day.”¹⁹³ However, such teasing reads as gentle ribbing, for while tensions exist between Martin's upbringing and his assimilation with academia, it was Martin's mother who pushed him towards university in the first place. Late in the novel, a flashback sequence details the offer of a high school scholarship to the sixteen-year old Martin, an offer he initially rejects before being swept away by the enthusiasm of Brother Eusebius and his mother. Upon first hearing the news, Martin is “furious”, complaining that he “was planning to leave school” to work.¹⁹⁴ His mother, however, remarks that it is “a wonderful opportunity” and, with similar aspirations to greatness to those expressed by Rankin's mother in *A Pound of Saffron*, seems very keen on the idea of Martin attending university.¹⁹⁵ Unusually for a parent in New Zealand academic fiction, and in a sharp contrast to Mark's mother in *Cliffs of Fall*, Martin's mother is enamoured with the idea of her son attending university and going on to bigger and better things, but as time goes on the reality of Martin outgrowing her influence does appear to weigh somewhat on her mind. What is most important to note in this passage is Martin's initial uninterest in university, which is turned by the enthusiasm of Brother Eusebius, who

¹⁹³ Dan Davin, *Not Here, Not Now*, R. Hale, London, 1970, p. 91

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 320

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 320

“seemed to be dreaming a private dream” when he tells Martin that he “might even get a Rhodes scholarship and go to Oxford,” with Martin concluding that he might as well pursue the brother's dream; “Why not, after all?”¹⁹⁶ Once again, idealisation of the university and the opportunities it represents is at play, convincing Martin to abandon ideas of “getting a thousand a year in a job in the Islands” to “go back to...a boarding school,”¹⁹⁷ although, unlike Mark, his idealisation does him little disservice, save for the distance between himself and his parents.

Generational tension within the Cody family is less palpable than it is within the Burkes, although it does exist, as the following words from Mrs. Cody to Martin neatly demonstrate:

You'll be going among all sorts of high-up people when you get that Rhodes Scholarship and go to Oxford. I wouldn't want you to get stuck-up and start putting on the gyver and forgetting your own, but I wouldn't want you to be wearing a watch you felt ashamed of.¹⁹⁸

Non-intellectuals in the New Zealand university novels so far discussed have operated under the assumption that one can either be an intellectual or working-class, but here Mrs. Cody shows an understanding of the potential for someone to occupy the grey area between both ends of the usual binary, while acknowledging that to do so is to walk a fine line. With a Rhodes Scholarship practically a certainty, Mrs. Cody would hate for Martin to forget his

¹⁹⁶ *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 320

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 320

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 207

roots, but she would also hate him to fail in keeping up with the upper-crust students he is bound to encounter at Oxford, and so wants to buy him a watch which is sure to impress. This is made explicit when she “looks obstinate” after a watch is purchased and adds that she wants Martin “to be able to hold [his] own” when he is “out among the black stranger.”¹⁹⁹ The use of the “black stranger” suggests that, as with Mrs. Burke, Mrs. Cody sees the university as a cultural force that will lead her son astray, even though she remains proud of Martin's success. However, Mrs. Cody's behaviour shows a more compassionate model of the generational tension evident in the earlier novel; by begrudgingly accepting her son's path in life, she can be seen as a less restrictive influence than the Burkes, to the point that Martin feels guilt over his drive for success (Martin becomes “conscience-stricken” by her tone of voice at one point; “Had he become such a tyrant?”),²⁰⁰ which effectively ensures Mrs. Cody's status as the ultimate authority in Martin's life. But while Mrs. Cody manages this without contact with the university or its representatives, Mr. Cody engages with the academic aspects of Martin's life, in another passage that demonstrates the potential for a fusion between intellectualism and pastoralism.

Generational Reconciliation in *Not Here, Not Now*

Part VI of the novel opens with Martin spending a day working on the wharves in Bluff with his father, and amongst this activity we see how Martin is able to align himself with academia without losing his working-class roots. Martin wears “his father's old hob-nailed boots” as he works alongside the union men,²⁰¹ who accept him because “most of them had worked with

¹⁹⁹ *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 209

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 207

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 273

Martin there at one time or another,”²⁰² showing that he has earned their trust by joining in their physical labour and proving himself able to match them. As well as showing himself to be an able worker like his father, Martin's interactions with Hobbs, an unemployed man with six children, demonstrate an appreciation of the effects of the Depression on working-class men that would likely be beyond the realm of a student more strongly adhered to the tenets of traditional university culture, such as Mark Burke. Whether offering Hobbs a cigarette from his “makings”,²⁰³ or giving him his “spare” pie,²⁰⁴ Martin shares a camaraderie with his fellow workers in a way which goes beyond being a good labourer; in contrast to the individualism to be found in the academic world, here Martin finds the “warm heart of fellowship” and “ties of manly sympathy” George Chamier mentions in *Philosopher Dick*.²⁰⁵ While Jock Phillips points out that “Chamier obviously romanticised” the idea of New Zealand “mateship”,²⁰⁶ he admits that connections between frontier males “did sanction a definite set of moral attitudes and a clear code of behaviour,”²⁰⁷ so by participating in this code Martin allies himself with the other workers and is able to gain acceptance in their eyes, even though as a student it would be reasonable to expect a backlash against his intellectualism.

A more unlikely vehicle of reconciliation comes in the form of Carrington, the Professor of Economic History, who pays a visit to the wharf while conducting research on imports and exports. Carrington talks with Mr. Cody while Martin works, and he makes a good

²⁰² *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 273

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 274

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 275

²⁰⁵ *Philosopher Dick*, p. 40

²⁰⁶ *A Man's Country?*, p. 28

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28

impression: “He was a nice-spoken chap, that Professor of yours.”²⁰⁸ Martin's father seems quite surprised at how well he gets on with Carrington, opining that he “seemed to get the hang of things quite well for someone who's not a practical man”,²⁰⁹ even though he “sounded a bit of a red-fed” because he has “[n]o time for [Stanley] Baldwin or any of that lot over in England.”²¹⁰ Here it is evident that simply getting “the hang of things” is not enough to win the allegiance of working men like Mr. Cody; a shared ideology is also necessary; and socialists, like intellectuals, are met with suspicion in New Zealand masculine society to such a point that it is often assumed that they are one and the same. This can be seen in the following exchange between Martin and his father, which comes after Mr. Cody's “red-fed” accusation:

“But you don't think much of them yourself, and you wouldn't call yourself a red-fed.”

“Well, I'm a Labour man. It's natural for me. But you don't expect a well-educated chap like that to be talking that way. What's he like? Is he good at his job?”

“About the only man in the country who knows anything about economics, that's all.”

“It sounds like a put-up job between you. From what he said about you I hardly knew it was my boy he was talking about.”²¹¹

Mr. Cody naturally assumes that Carrington, as an intellectual, will have a different political allegiance to himself because he is educated, and is so bewildered when Carrington defies his expectations that he wonders if he is a communist, because for Mr. Cody it is “natural” to be against “that lot over in England” himself as he is a Labour supporter, whereas Carrington, in

²⁰⁸ *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 280

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 280

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 280

Mr. Cody's mind, earns himself a dubious quality for also being against Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative Prime Minister of the United Kingdom at the time. Mr. Cody almost seems to think that Carrington has an insidious agenda in mind; although Martin quells this by pointing out the professor's knowledge of economics, a form of practical knowledge Mr. Cody can appreciate, which helps legitimise Carrington's level of education and remove the stigma that intellectualism is often saddled with in working class environments. This passage is perhaps the best in the novel at demonstrating the fragile tension between the academic elite and the working class and showing how a reasonable discourse can help towards reconciliation, but elsewhere in the novel, the tension between the two ideologies is emphasised by the vastness of the gap that separates them.

Idealised Intellectualism in *Not Here, Not Now*

Any tension between the working class and academia must surely have been especially severe during the Great Depression, when the gaps between those with and those without was immense. Davin devotes most of this novel to Martin's dalliances with Delia and interactions with other students and professors, but when he visits his cousin Bernie, who is “in Dunedin for a spell,”²¹² the description of the house Bernie rents stands in stark contrast to the opulent surroundings of the academic elite: “[t]he old wooden house...hadn't seen a coat of paint for many a day”;²¹³ there is no carpet; the banister is ignobly slicked with grease; even the chrysanthemums in the garden are “dirty and the colour of dried blood.”²¹⁴ However, when Martin meets with Professor Doig, his office is lined with bookcases housing “leather-bound

²¹² *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 106

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 106

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106

editions of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns,”²¹⁵ and later when he and Professor Boyce share a meal in the latter's sitting-room, they enjoy Turkish coffee and brandy, leading Boyce to remark that he is “a little ashamed to be so comfortable in times like these” before admitting that he cannot be sure that he does not feel guilty “for the sake of the extra savour.”²¹⁶ Doig's leather-bound books are presumably valuable and seem to stand as a reminder of his status as a formidable presence in the university, but Boyce's comments are especially pompous in comparison to the deplorable living conditions of Bernie, and highlight the inability to empathise with the proletariat, a trait which academics are often accused of possessing. Yet while Boyle is flippant here, his motivations perhaps have more to do with conforming to traditional standards of behaviour expected of professors than merely being blasé.

Elaine Showalter writes of using academic fiction as ersatz guides to behaviour befitting a professor because “they fit a novice's need to fit into a culture” after she “took an immigrant's passionate ethnographic interest in their details of academic manners.”²¹⁷ In Martin's interactions with the wife of Professor Reid, it is implied that Mrs. Reid also adheres to this idea of “academic manners”, for it is noted that she feels it “her duty, as wife of the Professor of Romance Languages, to specialize in French pastry.”²¹⁸ There are hints of *Lucky Jim's* Welch in these thoughts, and this notion is strengthened as her musings go on: “Mrs. Reid cultivated an interest in the arts, especially in literature. This boiled down in the end to buying and beginning to read all the new novels, but actually finishing only what she called

²¹⁵ *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 169

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184

²¹⁷ *Faculty Towers*, p. 2

²¹⁸ *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 254

the nice ones.”²¹⁹ The portrayal of Mrs. Reid is slightly comic, yet she, Doig and Boyle could be considered guilty of the same crime as Welch; equating wealth with culture. Doig's books need not necessarily be leather-bound, Boyle is not forced to order Turkish coffee and Mrs. Reid buys novels in an attempt to appear more cultured, all of which suggests they are all buying into an ideal of what a professor, or a professor's wife, should be, instead of carving out a more individual path. This idealisation of appearing cultured can be seen in Mrs. Reid's conversation with Martin, during which he wryly observes that it is unfortunate that psychoanalysis “hadn't yet become respectable in these parts”,²²⁰ implying that Mrs. Reid's conversation is motivated more by her desire to conform to “respectable” ideas than an urge for intelligent debate. Yet while these portrayals seem to be laced with some light satire, Martin shares in their idealisation of campus ideals even as he sneers at others who do the same.

Campus Politics and Gossip in *Not Here, Not Now*

Davin's novel, as Carter points out, “swallows whole the deferential assumptions underpinning the Rhodes.”²²¹ Just as Martin gets swept up in Brother Eusebius' excitement over his potential university scholarship, his pursuit of the Rhodes seems to be motivated purely by Delia's coercion:

“Have you thought about going for a Rhodes?” she asked.

²¹⁹ *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 255

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 256

²²¹ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 191

“Me? You've got to be much better than I am at all sorts of things for that, haven't you?

Anyway, it's too early to think about that.”

“It's never too early...You've got brains enough, I reckon. We'll have to make you work.”²²²

Delia's desire for Martin to pursue a scholarship is an effort to replace Alan Grant, her former boyfriend who left her behind after becoming a Rhodes Scholar,²²³ although in Martin she has someone malleable in contrast to Alan's excessive confidence. This seems to be the sole reason for Martin's pursuit of the Rhodes, suggesting that he and Delia are buying into the notions of cultural prestige which are intertwined with possessing an Oxford education. As we have seen, this cultural prestige was considered “central to British public life” in the early years of the twentieth century,²²⁴ although the same is hardly true for Depression-era New Zealand, rendering Martin's efforts an attempt to appropriate Oxford prestige as a more pleasant alternative to the culture he finds in his native country.

As well as these antiqued notions of cultural prestige, another tenet of Oxbridge culture infiltrates the Otago University of Davin's fiction: a tendency towards vicious campus politics fuelled by gossip among students and faculty. Those familiar with Davin's life know that he experienced the power of campus gossip first-hand; in 1933, deliberately exaggerated letters written to Davin by Geoffrey Flavell, an old school friend, were “copied and circulated among senior people in the Dunedin medical establishment,”²²⁵ of which Flavell was a

²²² *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 45

²²³ Phillip Wilson, Review of *Not Here, Not Now*, New Zealand Listener, October 29, 1970, p. 21

²²⁴ “From Narragonia to Elysium,” p. 35

²²⁵ *A Fighting Withdrawal*, p. 74

student. The letters contained highly embellished accounts of typical student debauchery, with one example detailing, “in Flavell's amusing hyperbole, the conduct of a Black Mass in Davin's lodgings.”²²⁶ Needless to say, this did not bode well for Davin's first application for the Rhodes Scholarship, and because of the resulting scandal (which was not helped by his admiration for “a student communist called McClure”,²²⁷ his standing as a working-class undergraduate and his bohemianism)²²⁸ he did not win it until his second attempt. Martin faces similar obstacles in his own pursuit of the Rhodes, with opposition coming in the form of the deranged diary entries of Muriel Strang, an acquaintance who implicates Martin in her invented accounts,²²⁹ and it is in recreating this scandal that Davin illustrates the power of one's reputation within a university.

Practically every attempt Martin makes to set the record straight is little more than an exercise in abject frustration, such as his attempt to explain his innocence to Wright Goodman, the “President of the Students' Association”:²³⁰

“Has it occurred to you that the entries may not tell the truth?”

“Why should she have told lies?”

“Why should I tell them?”

“Well, you're the one who's accused, after all.”

“You mean that the defendant is by definition less likely to tell the truth than the witness for the prosecution? Odd legal doctrine.”²³¹

²²⁶ *A Fighting Withdrawal*, p. 75

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 76

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78

²²⁹ *Not Here, Not Now*, pp. 163-5

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 164

Martin is considered guilty until proven innocent, and when he asks Professor Doig to help him take the matter to the Professorial Board he receives a harsh lesson in campus politics: in a bitter irony, Doig refuses to investigate Martin's scandal in the interest of avoiding a scandal for the university, asserting that “[t]he fewer people who know about it the better.”²³² Here we see Doig imitating a Oxford don in the British fictional tradition, unwilling to put his reputation in the firing line to help the reputation of another and dismissive of the whole affair in order to preserve his own best interests. Just as Mark's Catholic parents can only provide inadequate advice in *Cliffs of Fall*, Martin knows that he “was going to get no more change out of” Doig, whom he describes as a “dusty old puritan.”²³³

Puritan values are definitely prevalent in Davin's Otago University, so Martin devotes his time to establishing “a reputation as a paragon of virtue.”²³⁴ Unfortunately, it soon becomes clear that the effects of Muriel's diary are far-reaching, for Beatrice, Martin's co-associate editor of the *Critic*, opts to resign because she is also implicated in the scandal and feels she is “a marked woman” as a result.²³⁵ Goodman strikes another blow by tricking Bill Mason, a friend of Martin's, to stand for Intellectual Representative against Martin by convincing him that Martin had opted not to run; however, Martin works this to his advantage, ensuring that “he would escape the chore of actually being on the Executive and yet would have a spokesman there and a source for everything that went on.”²³⁶ Hardly virtuous behaviour on

²³¹ *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 166

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 171

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 172

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 173

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 175

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 179-81

Martin's part, but this scene goes a long way towards demonstrating how intrinsic campus politics are to academic success; if Martin wants to earn the Rhodes Scholarship, he not only has to demonstrate a strong intellect, but must also, like Rankin in *A Pound of Saffron*, take a cue from Chaucer's scholars and refine his cunning. For all his detractors, Martin does at least have one ally in Professor Graham, "an old man far from Scotland."²³⁷ Graham's nationality is mentioned only in passing, but because of the use of Otago University as a setting and the nature of his allegiance to Martin, the fact that Graham is Scottish renders him a representation of another form of university culture that has been over-shadowed by Oxbridge values in the campus fiction tradition.

Scottish Alternatives to the Oxbridge Model

Once again, it is Carter who helps shed light on Davin's fiction. "Novelists," he posits, "construct New Zealand universities as not-Oxbridge English universities, pale and feeble imitations of Oxbridge glories."²³⁸ They do this, he argues, because "they failed to assert the difference of the New Zealand university system," which was initially based heavily on the "determinedly democratic" Scottish model,²³⁹ and have to bear the guilt of focusing their novels "on English culture rather than Scottish structure."²⁴⁰ The culture of Davin's Otago University, with its rigid ideology, puritan values and petty politicking, certainly reads as a weak imitation of a fictionalised Oxford, yet while this possibly has more to do with Davin's allegiance with Oxford than Carter's theories concerning guilt, his use of Graham suggests that he too laments the loss of the Scottish tradition. Graham thinks himself a "freak" in

²³⁷ *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 176

²³⁸ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 274

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 269

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 274

comparison to his colleagues, perhaps because he prefers young people like Martin to be “trouble-makers”,²⁴¹ whereas Graham's contemporaries, like Doig, prefer to maintain the academic status quo within the university. He is also the only professor of those Martin talks to who seems to be genuinely inquisitive and open to new ideas; while Professor Sargood assumes that Martin's comparison between Tacitus and Rembrandt in an essay has to have come from a book as if “nothing new could ever be said”,²⁴² Graham provides a more hopeful idealisation of university values with his support of emerging publications such as *Phoenix* and *Tomorrow*.²⁴³ This contrast is similar to that which is evident in the words of Walter Bagehot, the English nonconformist who denigrated the idealised Oxbridge education as being “designed to teach men to write essays and articles”, comparing it unfavourably with the traditional Scottish “education of speculation, the training and philosophical application of the reasoning faculties,”²⁴⁴ a binary which essentially sets up the Scottish tradition as the more fluid and organic of the two academic ideologies, with its Oxbridge equivalent considered a tradition more focused on rote learning.

Carter argues that the Scottish tradition complemented the frontier lifestyle of the early settlers, as the “ruggedly democratic ethos” of colonial New Zealand led to “a university system better adapted to local circumstances”, meaning democracy and “poor communications between different districts”, with Carter positing these circumstances as common to pre-modern Scotland.²⁴⁵ With this in mind, the typical anti-intellectualism of New Zealand's masculine culture may seem somewhat anomalous, but while the Scottish model is

²⁴¹ *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 177

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 251

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 177

²⁴⁴ C.J. Wright, 'Academics and their aims: English and Scottish approaches to university education in the nineteenth century,' pp. 91-7 in *History of Education* 2, 1979, p. 91, quoted in *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 267

²⁴⁵ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 273

the more provincial alternative to the Oxbridge model, it nonetheless formed the basis for universities in New Zealand and thus earned the ire of practically-minded settlers because of its apparent lack of usefulness. Also, while the first New Zealand universities were Scottish in structure, the academic staff, according to Carter, “took their conception of what a proper university looked like from England,”²⁴⁶ resulting in a university culture which, like Davin, swallows whole the ideologies of Oxbridge culture, dispensing with the Scottish ideals in the process. Davin's Oxford allegiance is made clear in this passage, not only because Martin complains that all New Zealand's metaphors are “borrowed,” as are “our novels, our plays, our poetry” and our “[s]chools, universities” and “politics,”²⁴⁷ suggesting a pining for the cultural prestige often associated with Oxford, but also in the fact that, for all the potential for social commentary in Graham's musings, Davin does not pursue the topic and Martin predictably achieves his goal of winning the Rhodes and shipping off for England by the novel's conclusion. Whereas another novelist might use this opportunity to criticise the imported British culture in New Zealand and its effects, Davin simply presses on with his narrative, rendering this section something of a thoughtful interlude amongst a treatise of Otago University life, and this tendency to sidestep issues of academic ideology is also readily apparent in *Brides of Price*, his final published novel.

***Brides of Price* and Davin's Appropriation of Oxford Ideologies**

While Davin at least touches on ideological issues surrounding university culture in New Zealand in *Cliffs of Fall* and *Not Here, Not Now*, such issues are largely absent from *Brides of Price*. What is presented to the reader instead is a typically autobiographical novel which,

²⁴⁶ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 274

²⁴⁷ *Not Here, Not Now*, p. 177

as Akenson argues, “starts as an academic satire and ends as a Harlequin Romance,”²⁴⁸ leaving little room for more serious rumination. While this approach may render the novel unsatisfactory as campus fiction, because of Davin's habit of fictionalising his life it serves as a spiritual successor to *Not Here, Not Now*, as if Martin Cody has grown up to be an anthropology professor named Adam Mahon after winning the Rhodes scholarship. In this light, the novel can be analysed in terms of how Davin's necessary break from New Zealand culture affected his ideological attachment to Oxford, with close examination of the text suggesting that, for as much as Davin yearned for New Zealand, the ideology of Oxford ultimately won out. As mentioned above, Davin wrote to Sargeson that “the old navel cord is getting more shrivelled”, using the metaphor of an umbilical cord to symbolise his relationship with New Zealand culture, and, based on the representations in *Brides of Price*, it seems that the cord was severed as Davin became more entrenched in Oxford culture.

It is perhaps because of this entrenchment that references to New Zealand culture stand out because of their awkward placement, such as when Adam thinks that Ruth's hair is “as black as a Maori's”,²⁴⁹ or when Adam compares waiting at an airport to sheep being “chivvied through gates” in “stockyards back in New Zealand.”²⁵⁰ The second metaphor, while apt, seems designed as an excuse to mention the author's native country (stockyards are not exclusive to New Zealand, after all), while the reference to the colour of Maori hair, as with several other allusions to Maori culture within the novel, read as though Davin is striving to prove his loyalty to New Zealand amongst his recreation of Oxford life. Yet while Davin does not actively satirise or criticise Oxford culture within *Brides of Price*, in one passage he

²⁴⁸ *Half the World from Home*, p. 235, n. 33

²⁴⁹ Dan Davin, *Brides of Price*, R. Hale, London, 1972, p. 54

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 131

demonstrates a desire to simply be an individual without having to wholeheartedly adhere himself to one culture or another:

Now in all my years at Oxford and Cambridge and again Oxford I'd never learnt to punt. I don't quite know why, though I used to say that I'd once made the mistake of learning to milk and I wasn't going to make the mistake a second time of acquiring one of those skills that made one a slave.²⁵¹

While the novel offers little of interest to a discussion of Davin's difficult position between ideologies, this passage utilises the act of punting as a ritual which shows one's assimilation into Oxbridge culture, with the act of milking posited as an equivalent ritual for the New Zealand working class, suggesting that the enjoyment of physical labour seen in the other two novels has shrivelled as much as the metaphorical navel cord during Davin's time at Oxford. As in *Not Here, Not Now*, this potentially insightful rumination is dropped as quickly as it is brought up, but by using the word "slave", Davin implies that he has not fully assimilated himself into Oxford culture by refusing to punt, and this is further emphasised by his apparent conflict over Oxford.

Declarations of loyalty to Oxford are to be found throughout *Brides of Price*, but so too are statements of apparent dissidence, suggesting that Davin's allegiances are more complicated than simply adhering to one culture over another. While Adam relishes Oxford for its

²⁵¹ *Brides of Price*, pp. 191-2

opportunities to be among “an intellectual crowd”,²⁵² he also feels that it is because of Oxford that his “creative, synthetic power had waned” and his “critical powers had hypertrophied.”²⁵³ Adam appears to resent the fact that, while in Auckland, “the person you passed in a corridor or met in a lift might be your next door neighbour but one”,²⁵⁴ yet he sublimates the “primitive society” and suggests that Western society is a failure “because it could not find an equilibrium.”²⁵⁵ In summation, Davin's reflections on his own ideological conflicts answers few questions, although his life experience does offer insight into the complex issues at the heart of becoming an expatriate intellectual New Zealander, which does his more undervalued writing a great service. Yet because of his adherence to Oxford values he is still unable to provide a more complete picture of academic culture in New Zealand and can instead only offer his own experiences for consideration. To get a more robust idea of the state of academic culture in New Zealand in the 20th century, we must turn to one of our most notorious poets, a writer whose firm understanding of academic culture and deep appreciation of his working class roots allowed him to offer perhaps the best literary representations of how intellectualism is regarded in our society: the singular James K. Baxter.

²⁵² *Brides of Price*, p. 44

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 12

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 220

Chapter 3: “Between the pub and lecture-room” - Representations of New Zealand Academic Culture in the Works of James K. Baxter

“This ancestral voice”

In the works of M.K. Joseph and Dan Davin, as well as in the writing of Maurice Gee and Greg McGee, the clashes between academic ideology and working class ideology in New Zealand are thoroughly explored, but while these dramatisations offer useful insight into these ongoing sociological issues, the academic/working class binary in these works results in a narrowed viewpoint. For all their subtle differences, the works discussed so far retread a lot of the same ground in their exploration of the necessary break from mainstream New Zealand society felt by their intellectual characters and, as with the studies of New Zealand masculinity Kai Jensen criticises, they yield “few clear-cut conclusions.”²⁵⁶ In fact, both Joseph and Davin abstain from grappling with these issues, despite the potent literary energy to be found within such inquisition, perhaps because of their own adherence to the British tradition of university fiction, perhaps out of loyalty to notions of academic prestige borrowed from Oxbridge. James K. Baxter held no such loyalties; despite being the maternal grandson of esteemed Professor John Macmillan Brown, he was actively against the ideals of

²⁵⁶ *Whole Men*, p. 13

formalised education and, among other passions, sought throughout his life to perfect a form of alternative, organic education free from the rigidities of standard intellectualism. As with most of Baxter's pre-occupations, his opinions on the different approaches to education can be found throughout his poetic canon, his critical works and in his academic novella *Horse* (1985). Like Davin's *Not Here, Not Now* (1970), *Horse* chronicles Baxter's time at Otago University, which was coloured with frustration and disenchantment. Yet while his writing can be termed academic fiction, Baxter, as one might expect, does not fit into the tradition as neatly as previous authors. Instead, Baxter tackled the issue in his unique way, meaning his work occupies a difficult place in the tradition of academic fiction, although it still allows for great insight into the difficulties of housing an untamed mind in 20th century New Zealand.

While Baxter was critical of academics he openly “despised for undue cerebration,”²⁵⁷ in a paradox typical of his persona he also begrudgingly admitted that his “true station”²⁵⁸ is with these same academics, such as when he reaped the benefits of academic success with his appointment as Robert Burns Fellow at Otago University in 1966. Baxter felt the same tensions between ideologies as Joseph and Davin, although his treatment of the proletariat was celebratory and admiring to an extent which they would not be capable of because of their academic allegiance, plus he faced these tensions head-on and let them actively inform his writing. Such tension is one reason why Baxter could arguably be seen as representing the identity crises felt by many men of his time, as he was not firmly in one camp or another but instead occupied a grey area in between which allowed him to explore at first hand through

²⁵⁷ James K. Baxter, ‘Letter to Noel Ginn II,’ pp. 70-2 of John Weir (edited with introduction), *Collected Poems of James K. Baxter*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, Australia, 2004, p. 72

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72

his writing issues felt by the average working class man, putting him in a position unique amongst New Zealand writers in the masculine tradition.

Thanks to biographies such as Frank McKay's *The Life of James K. Baxter* (1990), the details of Baxter's upbringing are well-known to most, but certain details bear repeating here in order to fully understand the origins of his attitudes towards scholarship and the working class. The tension Baxter felt between the two schools of thought began with his parents, Archibald and Millicent. Archibald, or Archie, was by most accounts an amiable, hard-working man, who received little formal education, though he harboured a fondness for poetry, reciting "Burns and Shelley and Byron and Blake...when the mood took him".²⁵⁹ He was also a conscientious objector during the First World War, with his outspoken nature making him somewhat of a notorious, though unofficial, spokesman for pacifism. One example of this notoriety came in the form of a letter written to his parents in 1918 from "somewhere in France" preparing them for "what looked to be his certain death".²⁶⁰ A copy of this letter found its way to Millicent Brown, who became strongly pacifist after reading it and, after meeting Archie, decided almost immediately that she wanted to marry him, much to the chagrin of her father, Professor John Macmillan Brown.²⁶¹

Both families disapproved of the union, but Macmillan Brown's disappointment is made more significant by his station as a highly influential and respected university professor who hoped

²⁵⁹ James K. Baxter, 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet,' pp. 121-55 of *The Man on the Horse*, University of Otago Press, Dunedin, 1967, p. 122

²⁶⁰ Frank McKay, *The Life of James K. Baxter*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1990, p. 20

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21

that his daughter would marry “somebody in his own class,”²⁶² meaning someone who valued formal education as much as he did himself. His complaints fell on deaf ears and Archie and Millicent became husband and wife. The genesis of Baxter's “quarrel with the status quo”²⁶³ is here, with his grandfather and his attitudes coming to represent everything Baxter saw as wrong with university culture. Macmillan Brown's disapproval of Archie epitomised the elitism that is often associated with the “wedding cake tower,”²⁶⁴ of academia, something Baxter articulates in his ambivalent introduction to his grandfather's memoirs:

I am haunted by this ancestral voice which insists that the intellectual and moral betterment of mankind is achievable and should be every sane man's goal and concern...I imagine he saw himself quite bluntly as one of the servants of the cause of intellectual progress. But to me his centre of thought and motivation is mysterious, because...the vantage point from which he saw the world...constitutes a problem for me.²⁶⁵

Baxter's issues with his grandfather's position in society complement similar arguments he makes elsewhere, such as in 'Education of a New Zealand Poet', when he writes of the “great difference between the big house on the Cashmere Hills” where Macmillan Brown lived and “the closely-knit Otago tribes” of his father Archie's family.²⁶⁶ His opinions on Macmillan Brown the professor (and thus, by extension, on tertiary education) were also heavily based

²⁶² Terence Baxter, personal interview, 11 Dec 1995, from Paul Millar (edited with introduction), *Spark To A Waiting Fuse – James K. Baxter's Correspondence with Noel Ginn 1942-1946*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2001, p. 47

²⁶³ 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet,' p. 122

²⁶⁴ 'Ode to Auckland', pp. 597-600 of *Collected Poems*, p. 599

²⁶⁵ James K. Baxter, Introduction to John Macmillan Brown, *The Memoirs of John Macmillan Brown*, Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, 1974, pp. xxxv-xxxvi

²⁶⁶ 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet,' p. 123

on Macmillan Brown's feelings towards Archie, suggesting that Baxter's arguments against his grandfather also have a basis in loyalty to his father, although these arguments are complicated by Baxter's feelings towards his mother.

So powerful was the influence of Macmillan Brown that even Millicent, despite her own earlier rebellion, carried on its spirit, albeit on her own terms. While both parents read to James and his older brother Terrence, Millicent's approach was more like that of a teacher than Archie's Burns quotations, with Baxter referring to his exposure via his mother to "Odin and Thor and Jason and Ulysses" and similar classical staples as "an indispensable education".²⁶⁷ It would seem that Millicent copied some of Macmillan Brown's behaviour, as she also took on a somewhat paternal role within the Baxter family, "[making] the decisions, and [making] them firmly and sensibly,"²⁶⁸ and is said to have taken charge of financial matters. She also "hated to be touched,"²⁶⁹ embodying the stoicism more typical of New Zealand men and contrasting strongly with traditional notions of softness associated with motherhood, and with Archie's allegedly warm nature. It may be because of this somewhat masculine stance that she often came off second-best in the opinion of James, who "mythologised his mother into a figure of menace".²⁷⁰ Archie, on the other hand, earned a great deal of James' respect and allegiance through his courage and individuality, as well as for his gentler, more nurturing parenting style.

²⁶⁷ 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet,' p. 132

²⁶⁸ *The Life of James K. Baxter*, p. 24

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24

²⁷⁰ W.H. Oliver, *James K. Baxter: A Portrait*, Godwit Press, Auckland, 1994, p. 24

Baxter's fondness for his father is well-documented, yet while their relationship was obviously paternal, there are maternal elements to their bond as well, as Archie was more inclined to encourage Baxter's poetic side than try to dissuade him as a more traditionally masculine father might. A representation of this can be found early on in *Horse*, where the eponymous protagonist pictures a typical conversation with his father, who, significantly, is said to quote Burns "in times of crisis".²⁷¹ In the face of Horse's desire to live the life of a factotum writer rather than that of a university student, his father admits that he cannot picture Horse as "a college man," before quoting a line of Burns ("*They gang in stirks and come out asses*") that leads him into a discussion of how "Varsity men are nothing but educated bullocks," in the opinion of Burns.²⁷² This is, however, a hypothetical conversation, and in the actual conversation Horse has with his mother she is more domineering than understanding:

'I want to write.'

'Write, then! I've nothing against you writing. You can go to the University and write as well.' Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were burning. This was the climax he had feared. If he began to argue, he would be lost. On open ground her cavalry would cut his forces to smithereens.²⁷³

While Baxter exaggerates his mother's more militant qualities here for dramatic purposes, these representations of his parents show how their different parenting styles manifested

²⁷¹ James K. Baxter, *Horse*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1985, p. 2

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 3

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 9

themselves. Millicent, with her “Newnham M.A. Degree in Old French”²⁷⁴ and her father's influence, would naturally desire to push her son towards a university education, whereas it would be expected of Archie to allow his son to make up his own mind, and this may well be part of why Baxter admired his father so. The publication of *We Will Not Cease*, Archie's memoirs of his difficulties during the World War I, gave his sons further reason to look up to him, as his courage in the face of popular opinion never wavered and this resistance to conformity despite social pressure and his position as an outsider reinforced his essential integrity to the boys. Archie's lifestyle also afforded him a certain intellectual freedom denied to academic men like Macmillan Brown, whose pattern of life Baxter imagined to be “emotionally and intellectually constricting”.²⁷⁵

In Millicent's defence, Baxter's negative portrayal of her in *Horse* must be balanced by the fact that she was a key element in his poetic development. As well as her education of her sons, she took dictation for Archie's memoirs,²⁷⁶ encouraging him to flesh out his prose to such an extent that “Terence believed that had it not been for his mother's persistence the book would have never been written”.²⁷⁷ This shows that she was not quite the tyrant Baxter portrays her as, but the act of portraying her in such a way shows how he thought of her as an extension of the homogenising effects of formal education extolled by his grandfather, whose “professorial knowledge”²⁷⁸ could never hope to offer the same humanity to be found within the “peasant wisdom”²⁷⁹ of his father. However, it must be said that Baxter had his ideal

²⁷⁴ 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet', p. 122

²⁷⁵ Introduction to *The Memoirs of John Macmillan Brown*, p. xxxvi

²⁷⁶ *The Life of James K. Baxter*, p. 34

²⁷⁷ *Spark To A Waiting Fuse*, p. 33

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19

parents, with scholars attributing his enthusiasm for poetry to Archie's influence,²⁸⁰ yet recognising that without the tension created by the influence of his mother, Baxter may never have, as he put it, “broke[n] out in words”.²⁸¹

Baxter wrote criticism as well as plays, prose and poems, and almost inevitably referred to himself. Thus, the often-dangerous temptation to blur the life of authors and their work is almost overwhelming with Baxter. This fact has been very well established in the canon of Baxter criticism, with Vincent O’Sullivan insisting that “[t]here is no period of Baxter’s life, and no important event, which cannot be found in his poetry or prose”.²⁸² Baxter himself saw this approach as mythologising his life and declared that “[w]hat happens is either meaningless to me, or else it is mythology,”²⁸³ with his tendency to mythologise his mother just one example. Baxter dramatised his difficulties with alcohol, women and God, but frequently he wrote on the problems he perceived in our education system and, while *Horse* is among his most explicit and insightful writing on university life, his poetic canon has to be explored first. This must be done because, as Charles Brasch observed, Baxter wrote “poetry rather than poems,” meaning that each piece of his writing was part of a cohesive whole, “chopped off arbitrarily from a continuous poetic conveyor-belt,”²⁸⁴ so to consider *Horse* separately from the poetic canon would do the poet a disservice as well as hinder our understanding.

²⁸⁰ *Spark To A Waiting Fuse*, p. 85

²⁸¹ 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet,' p. 122

²⁸² Vincent O’Sullivan, *James K. Baxter*, Oxford University Press, Wellington, 1976, p. 4

²⁸³ 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet,' p. 122

²⁸⁴ Charles Brasch, 'Phrases and Poems', *New Zealand Monthly Review* (December 1966), p. 22, quoted in Vincent O’Sullivan, *James K. Baxter*, p. 19

“Too wide a gap”

As early as 1944, when Baxter was eighteen, he made use of the “gap” he felt between himself and the rest of mainstream society, as in the poem 'In City Night' (1944): “What father left to son, what neighbours say, / Has grown unreal - and the generations, / Too wide a gap for surgery to splay”.²⁸⁵ Here Baxter alludes to what his father “left to” him, presumably Archie's poetic and peasant wisdom, with the talk of the neighbours standing in contrast and possibly representing the rumours that abounded during wartime of the Baxters being in cahoots with the Japanese military.²⁸⁶ As well as seeing how deftly he mixed autobiography with imagery, we can also see his awareness of the ideological gap he felt and its wider implications; namely, that his disenchantment with his immediate society “[h]as grown unreal” to the point of no return, causing this early poem to read as Baxter’s announcement to the world that his allegiance lies with his father’s wisdom, if indeed it has to lie anywhere. As for his mention of “generations”, this could be a subtle reference to his grandfather, who was “a pioneer in education” and “whose labour and devotion helped to shape our society”,²⁸⁷ yet Baxter could only think of him as a symbol for “a system of education, a puritan devotion to hard work and material advancement, conformity, and respectability”.²⁸⁸ By reading further into the Baxter canon we can see how this “too wide” gap became a barrier standing in the way of assimilation into the world of formal education that never toppled.

“In the Lecture Room”, the first stanza of Baxter’s lyric sequence ‘Cressida’ (1951), offers a brief caricature of a university lecture room, beginning with a lecturer’s “impartial prose”

²⁸⁵ ‘In City Night’ pp. 20-1 in *Collected Poems*, p. 20

²⁸⁶ *The Life of James K. Baxter*, pp. 60-61

²⁸⁷ James K. Baxter, *The Fire and the Anvil: Note on Modern Poetry*, New Zealand University Press, Wellington, 1957, p. 57

²⁸⁸ *The Life of James K. Baxter*, p. 32

being droned in “the raftered room”.²⁸⁹ Having the lecturer “drone” implies boredom and a lack of vitality, a feeling which is emphasised by the suggestion that his words are over-powered by the sound of “[t]he soft weir water’s boom”. The grandness of “the raftered room” is also undermined by this description of the lecturer, not to mention the “mock-Gothic window,” with “mock” gaining natural emphasis from the preceding lines - the language describing the lecturer casts the lyric as a work of satire. As for the male and female students, it is tempting to see them as another reference to his parents, as if Baxter were implying that the lecturer is Macmillan Brown and his parents the uninterested students. It is more likely, however, that they simply represent common attitudes, with the young woman’s lines weighted with sexual tension, as she bites her pencil and lowers her “frock an inch” so it “would look well in that shade.” While her pencil-biting could be seen as the sign of an attentive student (her location in “the second bench” supports this interpretation), it also carries phallic and flirtatious connotations, and the young man’s observation that “[s]he has a scholar’s learning / And the innocence of a child” completes Baxter’s picture: the blonde woman is a diligent student, but despite being knowledgeable in academic pursuits she is naïve in the ways of the world, as she is oblivious to the young man’s carnal desires.

The sequence ends with the lecturer pausing to rub “an itching wen” (or cyst), then doodling “a diagram in chalk”²⁹⁰ before rubbing it off again. This implies that the information he has to offer is unimportant and he is merely going through the motions, with the image of the wen symbolising the infection of his mind by intellectualism. Juxtaposing the interests of the students with the portrayal of the lecturer highlights the irrelevance of the information he is offering to a young woman only half-intelligent in her devotion to formal education, and a

²⁸⁹ “1 In the Lecture Room” from ‘Cressida (a lyric sequence)’ pp. 101-111 in *Collected Poems*, p. 101

²⁹⁰ ‘Cressida,’ p. 102

man more well-versed in the peasant wisdom Baxter favoured, who, if his position “at the back” is any indication, has little time for academic pursuits. Thus, in a mere twenty lines, Baxter provides an indictment of university education that once again shows the usual binary, with formal education at one end and its colloquial complement at the other.

‘To Any Young Man who Hears my Verses Read in a Lecture Room’ (1963) reads as a continuation of the exploration in “In the Lecture Room,” not just because of the title but also the mention of “[t]hat girl in her jersey and beads / Second row from the front.”²⁹¹ At eight lines it is a short poem by Baxter’s standards but it still doles out the expected vitriol by calling any lecturer reading his poems at the rostrum a “cheese-headed ladder-climber” and insisting that the young man of the title look to the “nostrum” of the girl instead. This gives the young man’s desires in “Lecture Room” a more romantic tone as well as re-emphasising Baxter’s opinions, which seem to have only strengthened in the eleven years separating the two poems. In the second, he disposes of ambiguity and adopts a blunt approach, insulting lecturers in general then finishing with the declaration that his words “are a totem / Erected long after for scholars and yobs / Who’d make, if they could, a bicycle-seat of my scrotum”, with the image of Baxter’s genitals demonstrating the emasculating qualities he saw in tertiary institutions. The barbed comedy of these final lines show Baxter is distrustful of academics who see him as a vehicle for their own advancements; even though some “scholars and yobs” would challenge him and his ideas, he still put them into his poems so they could become “a totem” of his defiant spirit. The reference to the young girl’s “nostrum” suggests that the carnal knowledge to be found in her body is superior to any academic knowledge to be gained from the lecturer, but more intriguing is an enduring conundrum

²⁹¹ ‘To Any Young Man who Hears my Verses Read in a Lecture Room’ in *Collected Poems*, p. 265

here between Baxter and academics like those seen in “Letter to Noel Ginn II”; on an individual level he cannot stand “cheese-headed” lecturers, yet he simultaneously yearns for the recognition which academics alone are able to provide. Faced with this difficult concession, the poet instead focuses on sex, perhaps because it is more immediate, although this short-term solution still leaves the tension unsolved and it continues to make appearances in his poetry.

Baxter and Allen Curnow

The extent to which this tension between intellectualism and peasant wisdom dominated Baxter’s life can be seen in the negative portrayals of education that recur in his poems, such as his claim that “[t]he Auckland Varsity gives me a pain in the rectum,” implicitly comparing the university to a haemorrhoid, in ‘Ode to Auckland’²⁹² (1972) (he also attacks the Auckland Art School, which gave him “a pain in both [his] testicles,” again implying an emasculating quality) or his plea to the reader to “[h]ave a wank for me, on the grass beside the Varsity” in the seventh stanza of ‘Letter to Peter Olds’ (1972).²⁹³ Both of these poems were written in the year of Baxter’s death, suggesting that his opinions on tertiary education changed little throughout his life. While his stance in this area may have been fairly rigid, there was still room for additional targets not so entrenched in academia, as seen in ‘A Little Letter to Auckland Students’ (1964). In this poem he refers to “[t]hree moa-grey professors in a row” who, he notes sarcastically, “[m]ost ably represent the status quo”, with the act of painting them “moa-grey” suggesting obsolescence.²⁹⁴ The moa image carries additional venom if seen as a reference to Allen Curnow’s famous poem ‘The Skeleton of the Great Moa

²⁹² ‘Ode to Auckland’ in *Collected Poems*, p. 599

²⁹³ ‘Letter to Peter Olds,’ pp. 578-81 in *Collected Poems*, p. 581

²⁹⁴ ‘A Little Letter to Auckland Students,’ pp. 291-293 in *Collected Poems*, p. 292

in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch' (1943), which deals with Curnow's anxieties about feeling displaced in New Zealand; as the moa is propped up "on iron crutches,"²⁹⁵ Curnow in this poem is similarly unable to metaphorically stand upright without unnatural reinforcement. Curnow's poem concludes with a resigned acceptance of the fact that he will never "learn the trick of standing upright here", representing his inability to embody a proper national identity, whereas Baxter, as a poet of a later generation, seems to have found standing up to be no problem.

While occasionally brimming with praise for Baxter, calling him "far and away the most gifted of our younger poets,"²⁹⁶ Curnow's review of the second *Poetry Yearbook* also accuses him of having "fatty degeneration of the verse" and "lack of nerve and sinew,"²⁹⁷ and insists that he needs a "sterner climate" of criticism in order to achieve "the right progress" for a poet of his talents. Given Baxter's opinions on the structures of formal education, it is hard to see him agreeing with Curnow on what "the right progress" might have been, so he uses Curnow's own metaphor against him, putting him in obsolete allegiance with the "professors in a row". This image complements Baxter's view, expressed in 1942, that New Zealand verse is "trite and rigid in thought,"²⁹⁸ as are the professors, so by casting Curnow in this light he is not only supplanting an older poet and showing confidence where Curnow was insecure, but also criticising his notion of a structured approach to poetry for being as irrelevant as the diagram in chalk from 'In the Lecture Room.'

²⁹⁵ 'The Skeleton of the Great Moa in the Canterbury Museum, Christchurch' in Allen Curnow, *Selected Poems 1940-1989*, Penguin Books, London, 1990, p. 89

²⁹⁶ 'The *Poetry Yearbook*: A Letter to Louis Johnson,' 109-15 in Allen Curnow, *Look Back Harder – Critical Writings 1935-1984*, edited an introduction by Peter Simpson, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1987, p. 111

²⁹⁷ Patrick Evans, *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature*, Penguin Books, Auckland, 1990, p. 165

²⁹⁸ *Spark To A Waiting Fuse*, p. 146

Baxter's Difficult Status Within Academia

Never one to be a deliberate hypocrite, Baxter also poked fun at himself as he became immersed in academia when he was awarded the Burns Fellowship at the University of Otago in 1966. In the appropriately titled 'On Possessing the Burns Fellowship 1966' (1962-66), he describes himself as "[a] Varsity person, with an office/Just round the corner - what nonsense!"²⁹⁹ The nonsense is derived from the contrast between Baxter's position in 1966 and his stance "in '62" when he longed to "*abandon/What cannot be held against/Hangmen and educators*", and by acknowledging this conflict of interests he shows that he is not above criticising his own role in the education system, thus lending his poetry further integrity. Also in 'Burns Fellowship' we see Baxter subtly move away from criticising the university structure to praising aspects of his father's peasant wisdom that he felt to be superior, as he proclaims that "any culture here...comes from the black south wind/Howling above the factories/A handsbreath from Antarctica". For Baxter, the heart of our culture lies in the hearts of working men, like his father, who cannot avoid the realities of everyday life as a prestigious academic can; by emulating Archie in his poetry he was able to use portrayals of working class life as a contrast to academia. Stanza three of 'Autumn Testament' (1972) provides a good example of this, as Baxter is asked "'What do you know...of butchering?'" by Don and can only reply "'Not a bloody thing!'", yet he can read a book by Régis Debray, a French revolutionary, without difficulty.³⁰⁰ By juxtaposing these two forms of intelligence Baxter shows, as with the students in the lecture-room, that intellectualism can never arm a person with all the education they need to survive; this ignorance with butchering he displays is also reminiscent of the practical knowledge/intellectualism binary of early colonial times.

²⁹⁹ 'On Possessing the Burns Fellowship 1966' in *Collected Poems*, p. 335

³⁰⁰ 'Autumn Testament,' pp. 541-564 in *Collected Poems*, p. 542

Baxter also uses images of his father to celebrate working class existence in poems such as 'To my Father' (1947), with references to Archie's "country childhood" which "helped to make [him] strong", his "country pride and gentleness" and a portrayal of Archie as "[t]he rock of passionate integrity", before adding somewhat unnecessarily that he finds "no fault" in his father and is thus tempted "[t]o stay your child".³⁰¹

Compared with references to cheese-headed lecturers, the imagery associated with Baxter's father is, as always, complimentary, yet a poem like 'University Song' (1945) also renders such compliments problematic. Notable among Baxter's poems by virtue of being set to music and its ties to Otago University, where the poet was a student during the time of composition,³⁰² 'University Song' recently had its first public performance in "almost 65 years" at the university, showing that its spirit is still relevant decades later.³⁰³ As evidenced by this lengthy absence, however, it was not always seen as "a national treasure" by students and university administration alike and was only performed at one Otago University capping ceremony before being replaced by the more traditional Latin song "Gaudeamus", a tradition which continues to this day. "Gaudeamus" celebrates some of the things Baxter most abhorred in the university system, from its proclamations of "Long live the academy!" and "Long live the professors!" to the inescapable fact that its use is a tradition borrowed from European universities. Given how much Baxter compromised his artistic vision by maintaining a formal, genre-specific tone throughout this university-commissioned poem it is hard to see why it was dumped so unceremoniously, at least until its origins are investigated.

³⁰¹ 'To My Father,' pp. 65-66 in *Collected Poems*, p. 65

³⁰² 'University Song,' pp. 32-33 in *Collected Poems*, p. 32

³⁰³ John Lewis, "Baxter-Lilburn score presented" *Otago Daily Times (Online Edition)*, 29 August 2009, <http://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/71789/baxter-lilburn-score-presented>

Ruth Wylie, a friend of Baxter's, recalled in 2009 that “[s]he and Baxter (then 19) were sitting on the banks of the Leith near the university's registry building, musing about why the inherently Scottish institution used the Welsh anthem *Men of Harlech* for official ceremonies”, with Baxter then setting about “writing rhyming words for a different and more Scottish anthem”.³⁰⁴ The Scottish influence comes through in imagery of “these hills” and “streams of wilderness”, with the remainder being as celebratory of university life as its antique replacement. The final verse especially shows how conscious Baxter was of his audience, as it places the centre of tranquility in the midst of a lecture-room:

But our sons' sons alike shall find

Perpetual, though nations cease,

Within these walls the quiet mind

The storm-unshaken rose of Peace.³⁰⁵

There is even an air of uncharacteristic nationalism in these lines, though with Baxter it is never that simple and his insistence that the reader “[f]orget not those whom Scotland bred / Above whose bones our cities stand” makes the poem read more as an affronted response to the progress of modernity than any form of celebration,³⁰⁶ and if anything is getting celebrated it is Otago's Scottish ancestry, or perhaps the Scottish academic model Ian Carter

³⁰⁴ “Baxter-Lilburn score presented”

³⁰⁵ ‘University Song,’ p. 33

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32

describes.³⁰⁷ He also includes a dig at certain ancestors (like Macmillan Brown, perhaps) who are “like the windsown summer grass / Now tall, now withered in our sight”, adopting grass as a classic symbol of regeneration, with the older academics “withered in sight” because of ideological differences over generational divides and Baxter implying that he and other students of his generation are the new grass growing underneath. Interestingly, Macmillan Brown was of Scottish descent, although Baxter regarded him as a “Victorian Scotsman” because “[h]is character had been formed...within the context of the Victorian and Edwardian social order,”³⁰⁸ which posits him as implicit in Matthew Arnold’s idea of a perfected humanity, with his noble ancestry overridden by his academic allegiance.

Whatever Baxter's true intentions, it is certain that he did not intend this poem as a compliment, even though certain parts are complimentary, seemingly complicating the idea that Baxter's truth can be found in his poetry, as in 'To my Father'. Rather than complicating the idea of 'truth', Baxter actually shows the complexities that come with true honesty, namely that opinions, no matter how much artistic freedom the artist can employ, have to be tailored to fit one's audience in order to achieve the desired effect. Then again, perhaps the poet's intentions are being over-estimated; in describing the composition of the poem Baxter remarked that he wrote it “unhindered by intellect” the morning after a drunken night, implying that it was written without much consideration.³⁰⁹ At any rate, 'University Song' seems so deliberately crafted as a Baxterian “Gaudeamus” that it stands as an example of the lyrical vitality lost when poetry is commissioned, leaving Baxter to “re-do” the poem in a

³⁰⁷ *Ancient Cultures of Conceit*, p. 273

³⁰⁸ *The Memoirs of John Macmillan Brown*, xxxvi

³⁰⁹ Letter to Lawrence Baigent (VUW Library, MS McKay 19/3/19)

sense, writing “Envoi [to 'University Song']” to show that the anarchic spirit was still alive in his work.

'Envoi [to 'University Song']' is a favourite amongst Baxter's poetry, mainly for its final verse describing “*one original heart and mind*” lost “[b]etween the pub and lecture-room”³¹⁰ which succinctly describes Baxter's own struggle with Otago University as a student as well as that felt by several other students at the time (not to mention today). The description of academics as “[a]ttenuate ghosts” is reminiscent of the “withered” image of 'University Song', and on the whole the poem reads as a version of the earlier poem which the poet wished he could have published in its place. The main notion to extract from 'Envoi' is the idea of Baxter's gap once again, as the first verse describes “an image lost / Between the eyeball and the brain” in its final line, establishing the idea of getting lost in the tension between two points, and in the final verse, which goes further by saying that the “*original heart and mind*” is “[l]ost” between “the pub and lecture-room”. The pub and the lecture-room work as archetypes here, each representing a different end of the professorial knowledge/peasant wisdom binary while giving an autobiographical account of Baxter's own student experience. This final verse also finishes the notions begun in 'In City Night', with the gap between generations changed to a gap between opposing ideologies, although the tension remains, reinforcing the idea that the tensions felt between formal education and peasant wisdom, between his father's approach and that of his grandfather, continued to inform Baxter's poetry throughout his life. While the side of Baxter we see in his poetry is key to understanding his inner workings, the more explicit side he showed in his lectures helps complete the picture, as does his novel, *Horse*.

³¹⁰ 'Envoi [to 'University Song']' in *Collected Poems*, p. 52

Formal Education in Baxter's Criticism

For the purposes of this study, the lectures collected in *The Man on the Horse* can be considered the cream of Baxter's lectures, not only because they were written while he held the Robert Burns Fellowship and thus demonstrate how he handled the problems with criticising the system of which he was a part, but also because they involve “a further exploration of concepts” which he had held in his mind for “a number of years”.³¹¹

Additionally, the scraps that make up 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet' served, in Baxter's opinion, as “the *corpus* of an unfinished autobiography”, with the poet cheekily adding that he had “no intention whatever” of finishing it.³¹² Of course, Baxter provided plenty of autobiography in his poetic canon, but 'Notes' is an essential source for the Baxter biographer as it fills in a lot of the gaps left unfilled by his poetic mythology. While not strictly a lecture, its inclusion in this collection shows that it stands beside the lectures in terms of importance and perhaps even overtakes them because of its wealth of insight into Baxter's origins and opinions.

'Notes' is a compilation of different fictional sketches Baxter had published in journals such as *Salient* and *Meanjin*, preceded by two articles, the first from *Landfall*³¹³ and the second from *New Zealand Monthly Review*. The sketches, like the poetry, read as fictional accounts of actual events that aid the autobiographical facts in telling the myth of Baxter, but they are not so revelatory as the articles. The first article provides an account of Baxter's upbringing,

³¹¹ Foreword to *The Man on the Horse*, p. 9

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 10

³¹³ Originally published as “Beginnings.” *Landfall* 75 Sept (1965), pp. 237-240

as the utilisation of it as a source above indicates. The account must be taken with a grain of salt, as the poet admits that “[a]ll mental reconstructions of those early events seem likely to be false – not deliberate lies, but an improvised and artificial childhood tidied up for others to look at”, although he also admits that he objectively remembers his childhood “as a happy time” even though he cannot provide specific, trivial details.³¹⁴ However, he also mentions “a sense of grief” which he describes as “the sense of having been pounded all over with a club by invisible adversaries” that he feels may “determine the rather gloomy tone” of his verse, even though he assumes that such a feeling of grief “is probably the universal confession of the human race”.³¹⁵ These seemingly contradictory statements show that Baxter, rather than having an unnatural sense of grief about his childhood, had a sensitive nature typical of an artist and thus felt the “universal confession” more keenly than those around him. Baxter develops the idea of this grief into the idea of an ideological gap discussed earlier, providing specific examples of its origins, such as familiar ancestral details and a memory of being surrounded, abused and beaten by a “crowd of boys” his own age.³¹⁶ The second detail foreshadows further recollections of Baxter's time at high school, showing the impact it had on his opinions on education.

The bullying of young Baxter, in accordance with the culture around him at the time, led him to “distrust mass opinion and sort out my own ideas” and, eventually, to create “a gap in which the poems were able to grow”.³¹⁷ Apart from the bullying incident, however, 'Notes' is light on autobiographical information about his school days until the second section, where he discusses the irrelevance of high school to his development. Baxter mentions practically

³¹⁴ 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet,' p. 121

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123, p. 124

nothing about the actual classroom environment, saying only that “the educative process never touched me” and that he “instinctively slipped [his] mind into neutral”, behaviour he continued to adopt as an adult when in company he had to tolerate but did not like.³¹⁸ What he does mention is how he was touched by things that happened at school, the “thefts, fights, escapes, punishments, [and] humiliations”, adding that these could have occurred elsewhere, say “in prison or on a sheep station”.³¹⁹ Further impressions of Baxter's life at school can be found in poems such as 'School Days' (1958), where he describes “[p]recursors of the adult nightmare” who “[p]lunged” him “early into the abyss of life/Where the tormentors move”. From this imagery it is clear that Baxter's high school education had more to do with peasant wisdom than education of any other kind, as he learnt nothing from the classroom environment but, like *The Jones Men*, learnt a lot about life in New Zealand from the school yard, namely that non-conforming men like himself will often be misunderstood and controversial. Far from being despondent about this, Baxter once again attributes the gestation of his poetry to these struggles, making sure to point out that “schools had very little to do with that”.³²⁰

Yet, in an obscure way, the schools had more than a little to do with his poetic direction. Like the professorial knowledge of Macmillan Brown, they provided something against which Baxter could align himself, with the irrelevance of formal education forcing him, it seems, to pursue poetry as a substitute wisdom; as he put it, to become “de-educated and find [his] own way by a sense of smell”.³²¹ Significantly, he goes on to describe the smell “of chalk dust and plasticine and ancient body odours” found in a South Canterbury one-room country school,

³¹⁸ 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet,' p. 129

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 129

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130

attributing “a piercing message of gloom” to the distinctively unpleasant smell of the room.³²² In finding his way via sense of smell, Baxter turned away from class and instead buried his nose in the healthy supply of books at home, which allowed him to get through school with minimal fuss, providing an alternative to formal education and showing how he was able to develop such a sharp intellect. His mother helped him out here, as mentioned earlier, and this approach to education allowed Baxter to follow his father's example and become intelligent without becoming intellectual in the stricter sense, ensuring that his education possessed elements natural and authentic, freeing him from outside agendas and informing the changes in his poetic voice.

Formal Education and Baxter's Poetic Urges

It is obvious that Baxter's negative opinions of his high school education began with his sense of its irrelevance. Later on he expands these opinions to include the damage done to his poetic voice by the imposition of “the abstract analytical processes” offered by the schools.³²³ He refers to his artistic urge as a “dinosaur's egg”, a characteristically apt metaphor implying that his poetic voice spent a long time in gestation and had its origins in a previous era. He also talks of “unconsciously erecting” defences around this artistic urge, so that it would not be withered by abstract analyses.³²⁴ It is a revelation that shows there was more to his objection to formal education than familial loyalty and adolescent rebellion; as demonstrated by his opinions on Curnow, Baxter felt that formalities have no business in matters of artistry.

³²² 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet,' p. 130

³²³ *Ibid.*, p. 131

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 131

In 'Notes' he provides the example of Ratana visiting the Prime Minister in 1935 to demonstrate the value of wisdom over knowledge, explaining how the prophet and founder of his eponymous church brought with him “a potato, a gold watch, a greenstone *tiki* and a *huia* feather”.³²⁵ According to Baxter, each item had its own symbolic weight, something which was lost on Michael Joseph Savage, prompting him to ask for an explanation. The symbolism employed by Ratana is abstract but worth repeating:

The potato signified the Maori, who needed his land to live, just as a potato cannot grow without soil; the watch had belonged to his grandfather Ratana Ngahina – it had been broken, just as the law relating to Maori lands had been broken, and only new machinery could mend it; the greenstone *tiki* signified the spirit and *mana* and traditions of the Maori people, and if the Prime Minister guarded these, he would have the right to wear the *huia* feather, signifying a spiritual fatherhood and leadership.³²⁶

Baxter's point is that Ratana would not be able to communicate his ideas in such a profound and imaginative way if he had gone through the university system instead of leaving school after “the fourth standard”, and would likely have presented his ideas in a much drier way, speaking rationally instead of poetically.³²⁷ The implication here is that poets have more empathy with those around them than those with a formalised education because their world view has not been narrowed by regulations and is instead based on intuition. He finally

³²⁵ 'Notes on the Education of a New Zealand Poet,' p. 131

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 131

hypothesises that “[t]he Maori people would have lost one of their prophets and spokesmen, and the Government would have gained another civil servant”, and there is perhaps a personal resonance to this story for Baxter, as his later role as a prophet of sorts shows how he followed a similar path to Ratana.

Academia and Politics

The connection between a tertiary education and politics is aired again in 'Conversation with an Ancestor', when Baxter says that

[T]here is always a connection, however tenuous, between the University and the administrative machines which act out the fantasies of the dull, man-killing brain of Caesar – a connection which university men themselves would deplore and attempt to diminish.³²⁸

For Baxter, the universities exist only to serve the government (or Caesar, to use his symbol), a connection he claims is part of his reason for writing 'On Possessing the Burns Fellowship', with the poem intended as an apology to “our founding fathers”, from whom “whatever money comes my way...from the benefactors of Caesar” was taken.³²⁹ Clearly his being Burns Fellow was a source of great conflict for Baxter, as he feared “that by accepting any gift, honour or public position, one may appear to condone our society” which, as we know from his time at Jerusalem, is an attitude he most emphatically did not adopt. This viewpoint

³²⁸ 'Conversation with an Ancestor,' pp. 11-35 in *The Man on the Horse*. p. 14

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14

is inverse to Matthew Arnold's notion of “a perfect humanity” which one strives for through enrolment at university,³³⁰ as Baxter condemns the idea of conforming to the standards of a colonised society. Yet the conundrum of how exactly to consolidate his persona as an anarchic poet and his status as an intelligent man of letters persisted, and it is perhaps for this reason that notions of “the Two Baxters” exist in the critical canon.³³¹

One example of this phenomenon is found when he discusses *Horse* later in 'Conversation', calling the eponymous character his “collaborator” and “schizophrenic twin”, as well as considering him the source of his poetry.³³² Baxter posits *Horse* as his poetic personality, the part of him that is artistically pure but has difficulty conforming with the standards of society, to such an extent that he opines that the Burns Fellowship should have been offered to *Horse* instead of the “family man” he saw himself as being.³³³ In writing *Horse*, Baxter constructed an alternative life story that exists outside his official biography while simultaneously sharing its origins. Just as he wrote passionate essays for Catholic publications such as *The New Zealand Tablet* which he described as “dreary words...excrete[d] like turds / To help the Catholic bourgeoisie” in 'Letter to Sam Hunt' (1968),³³⁴ Baxter used *Horse* as an opportunity to criticise the university from within, using

³³⁰ *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 182

³³¹ The idea of 'The Two Baxters,' or two individual personalities within one man, is refuted by Vincent O'Sullivan in his essay 'The Two Baxters – Or Only One?' O'Sullivan argues that this notion exists because “most of us do not easily accommodate the notion that personality is perhaps more fluid a thing than we like to believe” and that it allows readers to separate the aspects of Baxter they enjoy from those they do not (Pat Lawlor, *The Two Baxters* with essay by Vincent O'Sullivan, Millwood Press, Wellington, 1979, p. 75. The notion of two Baxters has some merit, although it is limiting.

³³² 'Conversation with an Ancestor,' quoted in afterword to *Horse*, p. 122

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 122

³³⁴ 'Letter to Sam Hunt,' pp. 429-431 in *Collected Poems*, p. 429

his own past as a template for this “unpublished and unpublishable novel”, while still paying lip service in his work as Burns Fellow.³³⁵

Portrayals of Otago University in *Horse*

Unpublished until after his death, Baxter's only novel portrays a few weeks in the life of Timothy Harold Glass, more commonly known as Horse, an eighteen-year-old Otago University student. Like other writing in the Baxter canon, *Horse* is rich in autobiographical information, such as the portrayal of his parents discussed above, and for most intents and purposes it can be seen as an autobiographical account of Baxter's own aborted attempts at tertiary study in 1944. Throughout the novel we see Horse reject tertiary education in favour of manual labour, which is portrayed as the environment in which he feels most comfortable. We also see a subtle criticism of university culture in the disastrous poetry reading by John Grummet (himself a Baxter stand-in, albeit at a different stage in life than Horse), which shows the conservatism Baxter saw as an inherent part of academia, before the novel's conclusion has Horse turn his back on university forever after being spurred on by the words of Grummet, as if Baxter is forgoing his education in favour of his poetic pursuits.

When we first meet him, Horse is waking from “a dream of crocodiles,”³³⁶ a symbol Baxter utilises when referring to academia that, needless to say, does not provide a charitable comparison. Horse avoids university as one would a deadly reptile and, in a twist on the family problems of Mark in Davin's *Cliffs of Fall* (1945), his abandonment of study earns his

³³⁵ 'Conversation with an Ancestor,' p. 17

³³⁶ *Horse*, p. 1

mother's disapproval. While Mark's mother would wholly support the idea of swapping study for work like that done by his father, Horse's mother has more in common with Mrs. Burke than might immediately be obvious, as they both want their sons to grow up to live a similar life to their own; Horse's mother wants him to obtain a degree, as she has, and cannot fathom why he would not follow this example, especially given his desire to be a writer. This is of particular interest, as it demonstrates how a tertiary education does not necessarily mean freedom from ideology, as Horse's mother wants him to get a degree as much as Mark's mother wishes that he had never gone to university. The attitude of Horse's mother suggests that the notion of "trying to be superior" is a universal point of contention regardless of familial background,³³⁷ although Horse does not seem to be very affected by his mother's disappointment, as he feels "an impulse to put his arm round her shoulders and comfort her" but resists as "it would be no use" and "[t]hat way lay surrender".³³⁸

Surrender in this case means giving into the wishes of his mother but, in a conundrum common to the protagonists of most of the novels in this study, Horse has to defy his mother's wishes in order to achieve his own independence. This confrontation with his mother is key to the mythology of Horse as he enters it as Timothy Glass, "the good son"³³⁹ and "ghost in trousers"³⁴⁰ of the opening chapter's title; by the chapter's end this ghost has "dissolved into thin air" and "only Horse [is] left alive".³⁴¹ Along with an imagined death at the hands of an omnipotent sniper complete with accompanying funeral,³⁴² the final lines of the opening chapter suggest a spiritual rebirth after the argument with his mother, as if

³³⁷ "Fretful Sleepers," p. 6

³³⁸ *Horse*, p. 10

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 6

Timothy has died and become Horse, “the redhot stove sitter” who works at a steel mill and shirks formal education, preferring peasant wisdom. In a sense this solves the conundrum, as it is not Timothy who defies his mother, but Horse, who lacks familial ties to hold him back.

This transformation also offers Baxter another opportunity to express his view that education destroys the artistic spirit, as Horse would “rather be shifting from job to job and trying to write” instead of doing as his mother suggests and returning to university while continuing to write.³⁴³ This, combined with Horse's “poor pass in English” emphasises the irrelevance of a tertiary education to creative ability as Horse's own poetry, like Baxter's, seems more influenced by that of Burns, favoured by his father. Here Baxter's argument is reminiscent of Adam bemoaning the fact that his “creative, synthetic power had waned” during his assimilation into Oxford society in *Brides of Price* (1972);³⁴⁴ this point is explored more thoroughly later in the novel during Grummet's reading. For now, let us focus on Horse's allegiance with working class values, which gives his adopted name extra significance, as he puts himself to physical labour like a packhorse. Baxter elaborates on this in 'Conversation with an Ancestor', saying that Horse earns his nickname because he is “ridden by everybody he knows, including Fern, his girlfriend, the University...the police, the Almighty, and...the head man in the ironworks”,³⁴⁵ leading to Horse being seen as a representation not only of young male students in New Zealand, but also of young working class New Zealand men.

³⁴³ *Horse*, p. 3

³⁴⁴ *Brides of Price*, p. 12

³⁴⁵ 'Conversation with an Ancestor,' p. 17

Horse and the “ties of manly sympathy”

How Horse mingles with working class men is seen in the second chapter, “The Mills of God”, which gives a portrait of the working environment at the ironworks and, like Part VI of *Not Here, Not How*, demonstrates how the educated protagonist can become entwined with George Chamier's conception of the “ties of manly sympathy.”³⁴⁶ The description of the ironworks taken out of context makes it seem oppressively uncomfortable and dangerous, with references to sweltering heat and hot rounds that will “whip round [Horse's] neck like a lunatic python” if dropped,³⁴⁷ but as the chapter title indicates, the ironworks are the place to be for Horse, if only as an alternative to university. Working at the ironworks also affords Horse the opportunity to spend his fortnightly payday drinking instead of working without repercussions from his boss, Dead Loss Voss,³⁴⁸ which falls in line with his interests more keenly than university ever could. Despite the danger of working with molten metal, compared with all the complexities and difficulties that come with university the ironworks is a paradise to Horse because of its simplicity, not to mention the fact that his excessive drinking is practically an entry requirement to its world, and the relative freedom of this environment allows him to nurture his independent mind.

In this environment, the lone voice of dissent is the pious Brian, “a grieving angel of judgement”³⁴⁹ who refuses to play cards with the other workers on the basis that it defies the Ten Commandments.³⁵⁰ Brian sees Horse as different from the others and attempts to persuade him over to the ways of the Bible, with disastrous results as Brian asks Horse

³⁴⁶ *Philosopher Dick*, p. 40

³⁴⁷ *Horse*, p. 13

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21

whether he prays and he replies that he does, but to the devil.³⁵¹ It is obvious that Horse is trying to get a rise from Brian, presumably a popular pastime in the ironworks, but the confrontation here is similar to that between Horse and his mother, as in both cases they involve an imposition of a constructed value system on a nominally unburdened mind; as Horse's mother implores him to share her worldview, Brian hopes he can help Horse see the error of his ways and find redemption. However, where Horse is not so affected by his incompatibility with his mother's wishes, he is by Brian's judgement, for it follows him as he “trundle[s] the trolley back to the rolls.”³⁵² This shows how the men at the ironworks are more influential on him than the university or his mother, a point emphasized with this chapter's conclusion that “the mills and everyone in them” seem to be “the body of the world itself, tortured and changing in some process of long purgation”.³⁵³ Horse can feel “[t]he unshaped selves inside him...beginning to shift and uncoil”, demonstrating how the ironworks are moulding his personality in a process wholly more organic than any offered by formal education, religious or otherwise. To Horse, the “Mills of God” contain all the formative education needed.

In 'The Virgin and the Temptress', Baxter shares a parable about a pirate ship that is captured and overtaken by a new crew that imprisons the original pirates. The new crew has difficulty running the ship effectively and decides to free the pirates and put them to work, with the end result being that there “were quarrels from time to time, but no actual mutiny; and by degrees they found that they had a crew worthy of the ship”.³⁵⁴ The fable illustrates a process of

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21

³⁵² *Horse*, p. 22

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 22

³⁵⁴ 'The Virgin and the Temptress,' pp. 65-89 in *The Man on the Horse*, p. 67

psychological integration that can also be seen in the ironworks;³⁵⁵ even though the workers are not “good people” in Brian's opinion and there are confrontations,³⁵⁶ as a whole the ironworks run smoothly and there is a great sense of camaraderie among the men. Naturally, this comradeship extends to the pub after work, as evidenced by Peter's lack of hesitation in putting a pound up for Ivan's round because he is irresolute about opening his pay packet.³⁵⁷ Even when Horse over-indulges and winds up narrowly avoiding a beating from an irate Maori before “vomiting the whole world”,³⁵⁸ Ivan and Peter, “like an expert nurse”,³⁵⁹ make sure that he is looked after.

The imagery used in describing this particular escapade suggests a fraternal (or perhaps even maternal) bond between Horse and the others which defies his mother's ideas of the other workmen being “just a pack of dirty little animals”,³⁶⁰ with this contrast between her viewpoint and the reality showing once again how the education of Horse's mother has led to narrow-mindedness. In another sense, however, the opinions of Horse's mother are accurate although they are not necessarily negative; the workmen are a pack because they look out for each other and they are indeed dirty animals, both figuratively with their bawdy talk and literally, but it is exactly these qualities that attract Horse. Because they express themselves freely and do not expect Horse to adhere to their individual values, the world of the ironworkers, a world more in line with his father's attitudes, is far more enticing than the world of academia preferred by his mother.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 67

³⁵⁶ *Horse*, p. 22

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 24

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9

While Horse seems to have few qualms about the path he chooses in life, for Baxter, the necessary clash with his parents' "tentative programme for the future" caused him such distress that he felt it necessary to justify his decision in letters to Noel Ginn and Lawrence Baigent,³⁶¹ saying that he preferred manual labour to "Varsity" as his brain was "no longer raw-rasped".³⁶² Baxter's guilt comes through in Horse's hung-over vision of a slew of accusers led by his mother and Dead Loss Voss, who respectively say "[h]e lacks the capacity for love" and "[h]e'll never do any good".³⁶³ Brian also accuses him of rejecting Jesus, and some others accuse him of being "a vile drunkard", "a bad man", "a constitutional psychopath", "a sexual maniac" and "a gutless wonder".³⁶⁴ The last two accusations come from his girlfriend Fern and from Joe, the Maori from the night before, implying that Horse suspects that everyone he has contact with sees him as a deviant, reinforcing his guilt. While Horse's brain may no longer be "raw-rasped" by intellectualism, his emotional intelligence is severely compromised by his allegiance with the working class, especially in regards to his drinking. Baxter admits in the above letter to Ginn that "[d]rink often has the effect of an emotional upheaval on me"³⁶⁵ and these accusatory dreams of Horse would suggest that the same is true for him, with its position in the novel suggesting that this emotional insecurity is the price to pay for finding his own way in life, as it immediately follows a night out drinking with his co-workers.

The image of the plump Japanese girl in a kimono complicates this interpretation, however, as she melts away Horse's accusers and murmurs "*I am eternal*" and "*I am the living heart of*

³⁶¹ *Spark To A Waiting Fuse*, p. 113

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 400

³⁶³ *Horse*, pp. 38-39

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 39

³⁶⁵ *Spark To A Waiting Fuse*, p. 400

the world” (Baxter's italics),³⁶⁶ which are reminiscent of Horse's musings on the ironworks as “the body of the world itself”.³⁶⁷ The warm imagery surrounding the kimono girl aligns her with the ironworks, and the fraternal care Ivan bestows upon Horse (he even refers to him as “brother”) further emphasises this association.³⁶⁸ In another letter to Ginn, Baxter claims that “the physical achievement and physical pride of work” are “the primary source” of his poetry,³⁶⁹ and this lends an additional association with creativity to the ironworks, as if Horse's poems are forged under the same “process of long purgation”. Baxter adopts similar imagery in yet another letter to Ginn, saying that he had “sneered at poets who beat out each line on the anvil of thought”³⁷⁰ before admitting that he now does so himself, rendering the ironworks in the novel a metaphor for Baxter's creative process. With this in mind, we can explicitly see why continuing to write while attending university is not an option for Horse, as it would rob him of the muse he finds in physical labour.

Intellectualism and Creativity

Baxter's opinions on intellectualism and the artistic spirit are not restricted purely to Horse, as seen in his conversation with Daniel. Their chat centres around Hannibal, Daniel's dog, which Horse thinks looks “like a cross between a St Bernard and a kangaroo,” though Daniel feels the dog is as wise as Socrates.³⁷¹ Daniel's opinion that Hannibal is wiser than most men reads as another tip of the hat to peasant wisdom, as Hannibal lacks the formalities of a human education and possesses a natural intelligence. Horse's animalistic nickname and

³⁶⁶ *Horse*, p. 40

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40

³⁶⁹ *Spark To A Waiting Fuse*, p. 398

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 368

³⁷¹ *Horse*, p. 46

desires put him in league with Hannibal, too, suggesting they both reject the world of formal logic, as Daniel explains:

He's too wise to take notice of stupid remarks. It's your being logical he objects to.

Logic means the death of poetry. Hannibal understands my poetry. I read it to him often at night.³⁷²

“Logic means the death of poetry” could easily have been Baxter's motto, but what makes this passage especially important is that it also argues that an illogical mind will not only write better poetry, but will also foster a greater understanding and appreciation of good poetry. Just like Ratana, Daniel and Hannibal can see the world in purely poetic terms, as they have not had their minds shaped by any formal influence.

As if to prove Daniel's point, the talk given by John Grummet demonstrates how incompatible logic and poetry can be. Horse arrives late to the lecture because he was too busy betting on horses and drinking with Gandhi, once again showing the tug-of-war between his workmates and academia.³⁷³ Baxter gets in a quick dig at scholarship when Horse spies a list of people who got A passes in English and sourly derides them as “swots” for knowing “the date and publication of every folio of *Romeo and Juliet*”, implying that this information is irrelevant outside university.³⁷⁴ He also predicts that they will go on to be secondary school teachers, with the context suggesting that this would make for a dreary

³⁷² *Horse*, p. 46

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-33

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84

existence, but what is key here is that Baxter is reinforcing his idea that anyone who receives an A pass in English must see literature in banal terms, without passion. John Grummet, as a Baxter stand-in, provides the alternative, with dramatic and humorous results.

When Horse enters the cafeteria, Grummet is already under way: “- but shall we go to the grave on all fours? Citizens of Colonus, a man is a walking bundle of tripes, yet he is capable of knowledge.”³⁷⁵ Baxter's usual flair with language is evident here, although it is easy to imagine one of those A pass students rejecting Grummet's approach to poetry. Reactions such as that by Jack Cavendish, the Literary Club secretary, support this interpretation, as he has his face in his hands “as if he were praying for Mr Grummet to die”.³⁷⁶ Miss Gallon's reaction also aids this reading, as she is irritated at hearing Grummet “discuss the details of his squalid private life in public” when she had come “to listen to a lecture on poetry”.³⁷⁷ We know that Baxter might argue that a squalid private life is a person's poetry, as details of their life often come through in their work, and Miss Gallon's disapproval posits her as possessing a rigid view of poetry. The implication from this is that her opinions are shared by the others at the university, if Cavendish's urge to apologise and Gordon Virtue's comment that Grummet has “[a] brilliant mind going to pieces” are any indication.³⁷⁸ Clearly the students and staff of this university conform to the English curriculum, and their inability to think outside these structures is cause for much derision from Baxter.

³⁷⁵ *Horse*, p. 85

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 86

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89

Miss Gallon's comments are similar to those found in the letter Baxter shares in 'The Virgin and the Temptress', especially when the unnamed woman asks him, "Do you call what you write *Poetry*?" and compares his poem to "being asked to a banquet that finally ends up as a drunken revelry in a common prostitute's habit".³⁷⁹ This gives Baxter's satire of university culture extra teeth, as even more personal reasons for his parody become apparent; as in his attack on Curnow, he is able to settle a personal score as well as criticise academia. Grummet completes the parody when he thanks Horse for rescuing him from the 'Virtues' party, which he calls "that rat-infested dungeon."³⁸⁰ Grummet, as a representation of Baxter in his later life, openly condemns the "porcupines with their glass quills" at the party who are ill-equipped to appreciate his poetry,³⁸¹ with the representation of Zoe Virtue as someone "with too much time on their hands" who "hope[s] vaguely that culture [will] fill the breach" aligning her with portrayals of university women like Mrs. Reid in *Not Here, Not Now*.³⁸² Zoe holds hopes that Grummet "would provide her with Platonic consolations" by "discussing Byron's *Don Juan*, while he admired her sensitive profile,"³⁸³ showing that her idealisation of a poet like Grummet is laughably inadequate and, when she is faced with a far different reality, she reacts by trying to get the same result from Horse, with disastrous results.

As a poet like Grummet, Horse has a viewpoint incompatible with Zoe's, so that when she presumes to understand his motivation for stubbing out a cigarette on her back as a cry for attention and invites him into her bedroom, he is unable to get much enjoyment out of sex

³⁷⁹ 'The Virgin and the Temptress,' p. 72

³⁸⁰ *Horse*, p. 92

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 98

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 98

with her: “[h]is own mind and body were numb, as at the dentist's office.”³⁸⁴ In actuality, Horse burns her with a cigarette to confirm that she is alive,³⁸⁵ as if her allegiance to academic culture has rendered her inhuman. As in the case of Baxter and Curnow, the inner workings of Horse's mind clash with expectations of patrons to academic culture like Zoe, reinforcing the idea of a formal education as the antithesis to creativity. Further exacerbating the situation is the letter Zoe writes to Fern framing Horse as a potential rapist;³⁸⁶ once again, because Horse failed to fulfill expectations, Zoe is unsure how to react, so immediately goes on the offensive in a move not dissimilar to Muriel Strang's letters in *Not Here, Not Now*. Here is one of the few times when Baxter engages with the tradition of university fiction, as an imitation of Oxford campus politics is evident, although instead of causing distress, it leads to Horse's liberation. At the novel's conclusion, he meets Grummet in a bar, who spins him a few stories before becoming “abusive to the barman”, allegedly “for Horse's instruction.”³⁸⁷ Horse leaves feeling as though he has “drunk at the holy fountain,”³⁸⁸ which is in stark contrast to the “noose of culture” he feels slipping around his neck when conversing with Zoe,³⁸⁹ suggesting that the way of Grummet, the way of poetry, offers a pleasing alternative to the restrictive ideologies of academia.

Horse, Baxter's “schizophrenic twin” and source of creativity, presumably leaves academia behind forever, an act which Baxter himself was unable to perform, forcing him to remain “a family man.” As we can see, Horse remained a part of Baxter throughout his life and the tension between his creative spirit and his more diplomatic persona greatly informed the best

³⁸⁴ *Horse*, p. 109

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 119

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102

of his poetry, plays, prose and criticism, with his empathy for the working class over academia allowing him to be intelligent without alienating those around him. Yet still the ideological problems around academia persist into the 20th century, with more recent entries into the canon suggesting that the problems Joseph, Davin and Baxter recorded in their writing have evolved over generations, changing slightly with the times but remaining as detrimental to New Zealand intellectuals as ever. If even Baxter, arguably the writer best-equipped to provide answers to the difficult questions in the debates around academia, cannot provide much solace in the typical exile from mainstream New Zealand society, it is apparent that the problems at the heart of these cultural tensions are perhaps unsolvable and will continue to influence our society. It is with this in mind that we turn to the few entries into the canon of New Zealand university fiction of the 21st century so far, in order to identify the concerns of students as they are represented in more recent fiction and reach a conclusion on the current body of work in this niche genre.

Conclusion: The Noose of Culture - University

Fiction in 21st Century New Zealand

Baxter's "baggage"

In the ersatz tradition of New Zealand university fiction chronicled here, the emphasis on intellectuals who view university as a haven from the anti-intellectualism of mainstream New Zealand society, seen most explicitly in Dan Davin, mutates, in the work of James K. Baxter, into an exploration of how the ideologies and culture around tertiary education can be just as restricting as the oft-decried anti-intellectualist streak. By focusing on the repressive elements of university culture Baxter provides an antithesis to the Oxbridge influence in Davin and M.K. Joseph which implies that, with the utilitarianism of the post-war years, these Oxbridge ideals became archaic notions within New Zealand university culture. This can be seen when Baxter employs the idea of "the noose of culture" in *Horse* (1985), in reference to the stereotypically-intellectual behaviour of Zoe Virtue, and while the concept is used to satirise the ideology prescribed to by Zoe, it also applies to Baxter himself because of his dogged insistence on using characters and imagery from classical mythology in his work. Classical symbols abound in Baxter's canon to such an extent that his usage has been the subject of both a MA thesis by John Goulter ('Baxter's Strong Ghost' {1980}) and a comprehensive analysis by Geoffrey Miles, John Davidson and Paul Millar (*The Snake-Haired Muse* {2011}), with both studies noting that the poet's anti-university stance is rendered problematic by the inescapable connection between academia and classical studies. His pre-

occupation with Classics is termed “baggage” and,³⁹⁰ as with the “noose of culture” metaphor, the wording suggests that Baxter was as trapped by university culture as Zoe despite his anti-authoritarianism.

“Undeniably,” write Miles, Davidson and Millar, “classical mythology in English literature has been a ‘code’ associated with the educated elite,”³⁹¹ and while Baxter was keen to align himself with the working class and eschew traditional notions of academic prestige, because this “code” is “accessible to a shrinking minority of readers,”³⁹² his appropriation of classical mythology can fairly be seen as elitist. For this Baxter was criticised, with Iain Sharp thinking him “a bit of a phoney” because of his alleged desire to “prove to the literary world at large that he was not just a hick from the sticks” by “parading his classical learning at every opportunity,”³⁹³ and responding to a reference to Troy and Carthage with a plea for Baxter to “get off [his] high horse.”³⁹⁴ Howard McNaughton also argues for Baxter’s use of Classical references as a method towards legitimising himself in the eyes of academics, with whom he seems to hold “an ambivalent fascination,”³⁹⁵ all of which suggests that Baxter was more enamoured of academia than he may have liked to admit. Countering this, Miles, Davidson and Millar argue that Baxter, “in the spirit of twentieth-century students of myth such as Frazer and Jung”, believed that the world of Classical myth belonged “to the realm of the ‘primitive’, the natural, and the instinctive” rather than to “the public classroom or the

³⁹⁰ John Goulter, ‘A Guide to the Use of Classical Mythology in the Poetry of James K. Baxter,’ MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1980, p. 124

³⁹¹ Geoffrey Miles, John Davidson and Paul Millar, *The Snake-Haired Muse: James K. Baxter and Classical Myth*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2011, p. 19

³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 19

³⁹³ Iain Sharp, ‘Interview: Les Murray,’ *Landfall* 166, 1988, pp. 150-68, p. 154 (quoted in *The Snake-Haired Muse*, p. 17)

³⁹⁴ Iain Sharp, ‘My Grudge Against Baxter,’ *Quote Unquote*, 14 Aug. 1994, pp. 12-14, p. 13 (quoted in *The Snake-Haired Muse*, p. 17)

³⁹⁵ Howard McNaughton, ‘Baxter’s Strong Ghost,’ *Landfall* 137, 1981, pp. 62-6, p. 63

literary salon,”³⁹⁶ yet although a strong case for this interpretation is made, the damage remains done and, for better or worse, Baxter’s baggage succeeded in becoming one of his “most alienating qualities.”³⁹⁷ While Baxter’s inadvertent exile from mainstream sensibilities failed to be a hindrance on his writing as it was for Davin, the fact that Baxter could be seen as trying to endear himself to those whom he referred to as “Varsity pundits” demonstrates how strongly cultural associations can take hold in New Zealand society,³⁹⁸ and it would seem from this analysis of the canon of university fiction that a reliance on cultural signifiers is one unifying intrinsic factor of the genre. Whether to the detriment or to the benefit of academic culture, stereotypical ideologies are powerful currency in the campus fiction tradition, and just as *Horse* implies that the adherence to Oxbridge ideals in Joseph and Davin have become archaic notions within New Zealand tertiary culture, more recent New Zealand university fiction reflects changes in the tertiary environment, although, just as Baxter’s own endorsement of classical mythology implies an endorsement of traditional university values, the power of cultural signifiers remains as resilient as ever despite these changes.

New Zealand University Culture into the 21st Century

In “Why I Am Not A Public Intellectual”, Laurence Simmons’ introductory essay to *Speaking Truth to Power* (2007), a collection of interviews with New Zealand public intellectuals, it is noted that the education policy of the 1980s and 1990s

moved away from a model of input, where society accepts a civic role in educating its population for the greater good, to one of output, in which educational settings and goals

³⁹⁶ *The Snake-Haired Muse*, p. 19

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16

³⁹⁸ James K. Baxter, ‘The Rostrum: a memorial ode on hearing the news of my appointment as a Robert Burns Fellow,’ 1965, N26.12 (quoted in *The Snake-Haired Muse*, p.101)

are framed according to the commercial considerations of an emerging post-industrial economy.³⁹⁹

Bruce Jesson criticised this evolution in his essay “The Role of the Intellectual is to Defend the Role of the Intellectual”, stating that the traditional university validation of “a more specific culture that valued knowledge for its own sake” has been “replaced by business methods and business values”, meaning that modern academics “are more in the nature of technicians” than intellectuals.⁴⁰⁰ Roger Horrocks echoes these sentiments, observing “a considerable tension between the ‘critic and conscience’ role of the universities and their need today to keep governments happy and to fill large holes in their budgets by extracting money from corporations and wealthy patrons,” resulting in universities becoming more uniform in their structure, with the idea of intellectuals as “Laputa-style eggheads lost in a world of ideas” persisting despite the reality of New Zealand’s ivory towers becoming “mundane.”⁴⁰¹ In short, the corporatisation of the university system has led to a tertiary culture where it is more important to avoid offending financial backers than it is to foster original thought, with the apparent result that modern universities are viewed with less suspicion than they were in the early 20th century because of their passivity.

Whether or not this corporatisation is to the benefit or detriment of academic culture in New Zealand is another debate entirely, but perhaps the dearth in recent New Zealand academic fiction can be explained by this evolution. While New Zealand university fiction hardly has a strong canon, the focus on anti-intellectualism often showcased in New Zealand literature has

³⁹⁹ Laurence Simmons, “Why I Am Not A Public Intellectual,” pp. 1-21 in Laurence Simmons (ed.), *Speaking Truth to Power – Public Intellectuals Rethink New Zealand*, Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2007, p. 15

⁴⁰⁰ Bruce Jessons, “The Role of the Intellectual is to Defend the Role of the Intellectual,” pp. 9-14 in Michael Peters (ed.), *Cultural Politics and the University in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, The Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1997, p. 10

⁴⁰¹ Roger Horrocks, “A Short History of ‘The New Zealand Intellectual,’” pp. 25-67 in *Speaking Truth to Power*, p. 54

waned in recent years, leaving issues around the current tertiary climate mostly unexplored in our fiction. That is not to say that academia has been totally ignored; Damien Wilkins' *Little Masters* (1996) boasts a university drop-out for a protagonist, while the narrator of Stevan Eldred-Grigg's *Shanghai Boy* (2006) is an English-language teacher in China, although neither author secures much of a focus on academic matters. C. K. Stead's *Talking About O'Dwyer* (1999) fictionalises the life of Davin but focuses more on his soldiering than it does on his academic career. Maurice Gee's *Blindsight* (2005) features an academic in its narrator, Alice, although she does not receive the same harsh treatment as Paul Prior from *In My Father's Den* (1972), once again hinting at a possible dynamic shift in the relationship between academic culture and mainstream New Zealand society. Anna Smith's *Politics 101* (2006) is one of the few recent New Zealand novels to properly contribute to the genre, especially in Smith's scathing portrayal of Henry, a student with delusions of grandeur and a strong activist streak, although because of the novel's 1970s setting it cannot be utilised as a representation of the current academic environment as seen by its participants. Carl Shuker's *The Lazy Boys* (2007), however, offers a bleak, disillusioned vision of university culture as merely a legitimising agent for debauchery while hinting at the potential consequences of following Baxter's lead and attempting to shirk conventional ideologies.

The Lazy Boys

Baxter's image of "the noose of culture" is useful for analysing Shuker's novel, for among its primary concerns is the homogenising nature of any form of culture, be it academic culture, the culture of popular music, or the culture of the "rugbyheads."⁴⁰² Richey, the novel's protagonist and narrator, is ostensibly a university student, although he is scarcely present on

⁴⁰² Carl Shuker, *The Lazy Boys*, Penguin Books, Auckland, 2007, p. 10

campus because of his devotion to excessive drinking. Like Mark in Davin's *Cliffs of Fall* (1945), Richey ruminates on his station as a student at length, although unlike Mark, he has reasons for aligning himself with university which have nothing to do with intellectual pursuits:

Why was I here then? Because of all my options - joining the *army*, joining the *police force*, becoming a *mechanic*, going to Polytech, or staying at home going insane on the dole - being a "student" here at Otago University seems to offer me the opportunity to get a lump sum of student loan and drink most nights without being thought a bum and without having to really figure out anything else to do. Students are allowed, expected, even obliged to keep up the image - carry out new feats of bonging, drink the most, the quickest, for the longest duration.⁴⁰³

Rather than idealising the university as a cultural citadel like previous generations of students, Richey sees scholarship as a way to legitimise his "current interests and abilities,"⁴⁰⁴ i.e. binge drinking. Emphasising this perception are the quote marks around "student" and the juxtaposition of the role of the student with more practical career paths such as joining the army or police force, all of which suggests that the idea of being a student is barely taken seriously and is considered another mundane choice rather than an exciting opportunity. While the corporatisation of New Zealand universities is not explicitly invoked, Richey's view that being a student is no different from being a mechanic or a beneficiary suggests an uninspiring, restrictive academic culture where homogenisation is rife and mediocrity holds sway. University culture is only one concern of the novel, as the power of ideology is roundly satirised through Richey's relationship with Anna, who thinks that because Richey "like[s]

⁴⁰³ *The Lazy Boys*, p. 61 (author's italics)

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61

the Violent Femmes and Lou Reed and The Smiths” he has to be “a good person,”⁴⁰⁵ as well as in Shuker’s portrayals of “rugbyhead” culture, which is posited as a legitimising agent for deviant behaviour to the point that the rape of an unconscious girl by two rugby players passes by without consequence.⁴⁰⁶ With such an unforgiving satire of rugby culture at the forefront, Shuker writes little on academic culture, although, as usual, the interactions Richey has with his parents offer some indication of how tertiary culture is regarded.

Richey has to leave university early in the novel because of an unspecified sexual assault, suggesting a double-standard of tolerable behaviour between university culture and rugby culture, and before confronting his parents with the news of his departure from the university he imagines a hypothetical situation where he is “a good son” who “could ‘chatter busily’ in the kitchen and shout interesting news about how exciting life is at ‘the varsity’”.⁴⁰⁷ This fantasy represents the ideal homecoming from his parent’s perspective, suggesting a shift in the public perception of universities, with the fear of tertiary culture seen in Davin and Joseph replaced with the acceptance of and encouragement towards university seen in *Horse*; yet, interestingly, the university is still treated as an abstract idea in this situation - “the varsity” – which suggests that Richey’s parents approve of university despite not fully understanding tertiary education. In other words, the universities are still mysterious monoliths, only they are seen as beneficial rather than threatening. This does not prevent Richey from being told to “[s]hut up” when he attempts to quote *Paradise Lost*,⁴⁰⁸ nor does it stop an anonymous rugby fan calling him “a snobby cunt” and “a faggot” for quietly reading a letter in a taxi,⁴⁰⁹ suggesting that the acceptance of intellectualism is held only by parents in the world of the

⁴⁰⁵ *The Lazy Boys*, p. 45

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 218-220

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 179

novel, with rugby culture serving as a form of pastoral wisdom against the professorial knowledge of university, even though Richey is hardly an intellectual.

In fact, intellectualism is essentially absent from *The Lazy Boys*, a trait best exemplified by an interaction with Sebastian, a young man who was dux at Richey's primary school and "a prefect at Boy's High just months ago,"⁴¹⁰ yet despite these apparent indicators of intelligence, his conversation is peppered with phrases such as "I seen you" and "I'll fucking rape you, you bitch,"⁴¹¹ which suggest a poor grasp of English and an unusually aggressive nature. Here it would seem that there is little difference between the behaviour of the rugbyheads and the behaviour of those with academic achievements, emphasising Richey's view that being a student is simply another role to embody without any inherent meaning beyond debauchery. There is also Richey's lack of direction after he renounces his university enrolment to consider; without the label of "student", Richey becomes more and more nihilistic, until, in another nod to *Cliffs of Fall*, he apparently rapes and murders Ursula, his sixteen year old flatmate, at the novel's conclusion, before looking at a mirror and seeing "a pallid oval with no eyes and a gaping maw for a mouth."⁴¹² The implication here is that, without even the slim ideology of academia to cling to, Richey nihilism progresses to the point that he becomes the physical embodiment of negativity. Shuker's quote from *Paradise Lost* on the novel's title page ("...down they fell / Driv'n headlong from the pitch of Heaven, down / into this deep") and Richey's declaration near the beginning of the novel ("So the fall begins")⁴¹³ seems to support this interpretation, with these references effectively positing

⁴¹⁰ *The Lazy Boys*, p. 199

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 199, p. 200

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p. 295

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 8

Richey as Milton's Lucifer, unable to assimilate himself into the culture surrounding Otago University and opting to "reign in Hell" because he can no longer "serve in Heav'n".⁴¹⁴

Shuker's choice in cultural referencing is curious here; while musicians such as Kurt Cobain and The Smiths are constantly referenced throughout *The Lazy Boys* as signifiers of the generation Shuker writes about, referring to a high-literary work like *Paradise Lost* is jarring when set against the bleak, cultureless environment of the novel. It seems incongruous that Richey would be familiar with Milton's epic considering his resistance to education, yet while this hurts the realism of Shuker's work, it helps legitimise it as university fiction simply by the association between Milton and the university curriculum; as with *Horse*, *The Lazy Boys* is also ensnared by the noose of culture through the influence of Classical works, suggesting that, for all the progression made in the canon of New Zealand university fiction, old ideologies still hold strong, and the same is true of New Zealand university culture.

Conclusion

While Morris Zapp's assertion that novelists "make things up" and "change things around" when writing realistic campus fiction is fair,⁴¹⁵ analysis of the British tradition shows how campus fiction can be utilised as a way to gain an impressionist's view of academic culture, whether that view accepts Oxbridge values or rallies against them. The New Zealand canon of campus fiction is no different, yet while British campus novels will often be satirical, their New Zealand counterparts have a tendency towards tragedy. In *A Pound of Saffron* (1962), Rankin's manipulation has violent consequences for Terry; Mark in *Cliffs of Fall* murders his

⁴¹⁴ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Penguin Books, New York, 1667, 1968, p. 12, line 263

⁴¹⁵ *Small World*, p. 135

girlfriend and then kills himself as a result of his idealisation of university; Richey's reaction to the uninspiring ideologies around him ends with a violent rape and possible murder. Of course, the results are not always so bleak, but there are rarely positive outcomes from university enrolment: *Not Here, Not Now* (1970) ends on a bittersweet note, with Martin leaving his friends and family behind as he leaves for Oxford; Horse not only has his reputation tarnished by Zoe but also loses his girlfriend Fern because of his refusal to buy into the ideology around academia, and Baxter's poetry is liberally seasoned with his negative experiences in the tertiary environment. With New Zealand's appropriation of British culture, Oxbridge values have been distorted to the point where they are either heavily idealised by people such as Davin, who valued his university education highly and experienced a breakdown in his relationship with his family as a result, or rejected by writers such as Baxter and Shuker, with a more balanced, light-hearted treatment of campus life as seen in David Lodge apparently impossible, despite the largely egalitarian nature of post-war New Zealand culture.

As well as suggesting that Matthew Arnold's idea of "a perfected humanity" has failed in New Zealand,⁴¹⁶ this trend also implies that even the most rudimentary association with academia can taint the perception of an individual and their work, just as Baxter was tainted by his fondness for classical myth. *Speaking Truth To Power* is littered with examples of how this anti-intellectualism has flared up in recent years, among the most interesting being Frank Haden's *Sunday Star-Times* column on the death of Jacques Derrida, 'Now For The Good News: I'm Right and Derrida's Dead.' As the title indicates, Haden takes great joy in the passing of Derrida, a man he refers to as "[t]he shonky but disastrously influential French

⁴¹⁶ *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 182

philosopher”⁴¹⁷ while also misinterpreting his theories and opining that the writer “was responsible for all that was wrong with New Zealand education, both at university and at school level.”⁴¹⁸ Besides the repugnance of revelling in the death of a prominent figure simply based on a difference of opinion, Haden also employs that curious behaviour of disregarding Derrida while also using him as a scapegoat for all the flaws in the New Zealand education system, showing how the anti-intellectual ideals expressed in these novels is still being seen in publications as recent as 2004. Because of this persistent anti-intellectualism, it is difficult to arrive at a conclusion regarding New Zealand university fiction; writing on his masculine literary tradition, Kai Jensen ends *Whole Men* (1996) with the following summation: “As an heirloom, it’s both rich and curious, and while other countries have had their masculinisms too, ours is unique.” With the cultural battle between intellectualism and the proletariat still in progress, perhaps similar words can also serve the canon of New Zealand university fiction; while also an heirloom, our academic culture is unique amongst those of other countries, and while it is problematic, at the very least we have succeeded in veering away from Oxbridge culture and creating an ideology around universities which is entirely our own, with our university literature standing as a premium example.

⁴¹⁷ *Sunday-Star Times*, 17 October 2004, p. C2

⁴¹⁸ “A Short History of ‘The New Zealand Intellectual’”, p. 58

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